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The Stolen Bible

From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon

By

Gerald O. West



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The seeds of this project were sown as long ago as 1993, when Vincent Wimbush talked to me about a project he was embarking on, a hermeneutic history of the Bible among African Americans. Though occupied with the struggle against apartheid at this time, those of us working within the frame of South African Black Theology, foremost among us Tinyiko Maluleke, began to recognise that a more historical analysis was required if we were to understand what was being done with the Bible in the South Africa of the 1990s. So my own work began to take this turn, eking out time from the more pressing demands of working with the Bible as a resource for liberation to reflect on how the Bible had become an African book, and what had become of this African book.

This work has had many dialogue partners, most of whom have done their work within the broad terrain of African biblical and theological scholarship. However, it has been the work of the Ujamma Centre for Community Development and Research within the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, that has kept me connected with 'ordinary' African readers of the Bible.

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Introduction: The Distinct Bible

In a sermon preached in a rural community in the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa in 1933, Isaiah Shembe, an illiterate and itinerant preacher, healer, baptiser, prophet, messiah to some, and founder of a flourishing African Initiated Church, tells the story of how he and his conquered people stole the Bible from the conqueror and used it to restore their community.¹

The founder of the large and still thriving African Independent Church, *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*, the Church of the Nazarites, Isaiah Shembe, recounts in a parable how the Bible was stolen from the conquering missionary-colonial forces.

In olden times there were two might[y] nations who were fighting over a certain issue. In their war the one conquered the other one and took all their cattle away. They took even their children captive and put them into the school of the victorious nation. . . .²

The story continues with a focus on three of these children, “three sons of the same mother”. Among the tasks given to these children was that they “had to sweep the houses of their teachers and the house of the Pope”.³ Shembe goes on to tell that, “All these children made good progress in school and passed their examinations well. Then they were trained as bishops”. However, Shembe goes on immediately to narrate how there was a certain book that was locked away from them. The implication is clear. Children of the conquered nation had limited access to the texts of the victorious nation, thereby allowing them to rise to a level no higher than that of bishops. The Pope alone had access to one special text. This was the Bible: “In the house of the Pope there was a Bible which was kept under lock by him and only read by himself”.⁴ But, Shembe goes on to relate,

On a certain day he [the Pope] had to go for a few weeks to another place and he forgot to lock the Bible up at home. When the boys were sweeping

1 Hexham and Oosthuizen eds, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe: History and Traditions Centered on Ekuphakameni and Mount Nhlankakazi (Sacred History and Traditions of the AmaNazaretha)*, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 224.

2 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 224–225.

3 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225.

4 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225.

his home they found the Bible unlocked. When they began to read it they discovered that their nation which had been demolished so badly by the war could never be restored unless they would get a book like this one and they considered what to do.

When they came back from school they bought a copybook and copied the whole Bible. When they had finished their work, they returned the Bible to its place. Thereafter the Pope came back and saw that he forgot to lock his Bible in. He called the boys who worked in his house and asked them whether they had opened this book. They denied it and said that they did not see that it had not been locked up. Then he forgot about it. The boys considered how they could bring this book to their parents at home.

At another day, they went and asked permission to visit their parents at home. They were permitted to go and they were given a time by which they must be back. When they came home, they did not stay there, rather they went from home to home and preached about this book until their time of leave was over and policemen were sent to look for these boys. Then they left this book there and returned to school.⁵

My book, *The Stolen Bible*, tells some of that story, the story *that* Africans took the Bible from those who took their cattle and their children, and the story of *what* they have done with the stolen Bible. My story tells of how the Bible was brought to Southern Africa as part of a project of imperialism and trade, of conversion and civilisation, of colonisation and conquest; the story of how missionaries and other colonial agents transacted with this Bible among African peoples; the story of how the Bible was translated from European languages to African languages; the story of how Africans appropriated the Bible, wresting it from the hands of those who brought it; the story of how the Bible became a contested book, both a problem and a solution for African communities; the story of how the Bible has been embodied by ordinary African women and men, with its narratives being located alongside African narratives; the story of the Bible's role in the public realm of South African life; in sum, the story of the South(ern) African Bible.

It is a story that begins on the African coast and makes it way into the African interior; it is a story that starts on the periphery of African realities and jour-

5 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225.

neys to the very centre of African life; it is a story that has its origins more than three and a half centuries ago, and that continues into today.

The account begins with a Prologue, “The African Bible”, for though the Bible came to Southern Africa relatively late, it has always been, since its formation, part of Mediterranean North Africa. But the Bible was not brought to Southern Africa from North Africa or by North Africans; unfortunately, the route was more indirect, for the Bible was brought to Southern Africa in ships, traversing and trading with and in African bodies and goods. But we cannot tell the story of the stolen Bible without recognising and re-membering Africa’s enduring part in the formation of the Bible.

Indeed, the arrival of the Bible in Southern Africa is associated first and foremost with trade. Secondary concerns were mission and exploration. And as the interior of Southern Africa became of economic interest to imperial Europe, so trade shifted its focus from barter to colonisation. Instead of a way-station to somewhere more central to European trade, Southern Africa became a distinct European destination, a resource to be controlled and plundered. Southern Africa was drawn into European industrialisation. Chapter 1, “The Imperial Bible”, analyses the conscription of the Bible in the European imperialist project, focussing on the Cape Colony in the 1650s, as the Dutch East India Company gradually annexes African land for their gardens and in their pursuit of African cattle, both of which are necessary to securing the trade route between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Though difficult to discern amidst the ordinary day-to-day religion of the Company’s men and women, the Bible is present, playing a background role in the rhythms of the primary religion, trade.

Chapter 2 slows the story down considerably, refusing to rush from pre-colonial to colonial Southern Africa. The focus of this chapter is that important but under-described and under-theorised period in which traders, explorers, and missionaries moved among African peoples who were in control of the interior of Southern Africa. Before European greed gazed upon the mineral wealth of the interior, the interior was firmly and fully in the control of indigenous African peoples. While territorial contestation has always been a feature of African clans and communities, for long periods of time this contestation was only between Africans. Even when the coastal periphery was under the partial control of European imperial forces, and even when occasional traders, explorers, and missionaries made their ways into the interior, the interior remained under local African control for decades. This chapter, “The Revealed Bible”, lingers over this period, for it is the period in which the Bible was first introduced to the BaTlhaping people (who occupy a territory in current northern South Africa and southern Botswana) in the late 1700s, along with a whole

array of other European goods. So these earliest of encounters are recounted and analysed in great detail, recognising and emphasising African agency and autonomy.

Chapter 3, “The Dislocated Bible”, continues among the BaTlhaping into the early 1800s, allowing the texture of their engagements with the Bible to become apparent, slowly. Missionaries have now tenuously settled among the BaTlhaping and so a new rhythm is established, that of regular missionary proclamations from and about the Bible. And while there is not much African interest in the missionary message, the source of their message, the Bible, does appear to receive some attention from local Africans. This chapter shows and foreshadows the Bible being separated from its European missionary bearers.

And we remain among the BaTlhaping in Chapter 4, as the oral-aural missionary Bible-based message is translated into an African vernacular in the mid-1800s, a period of considerable flux in the African interior. Chapter 4, “The Translated Bible”, tells of and analyses this dimension of the African encounter with the Bible, focussing on the ideological and theological concerns and contradictions that slowly generated the first local Southern African Bible.

With the Bible now in an African language, and soon in other African languages, Africans of all sorts appropriated the Bible for themselves. Chapter 5, “The Appropriated Bible”, returns to Isaiah Shembe’s story of the liberating stolen Bible and analyses in detail how the Bible is used to restore African community in the wake of colonial conquest in the KwaZulu-Natal region. Isaiah Shembe is a significant interpretive figure, for he was not formed by missionary Christianity, and so his appropriation of the Bible is unmediated by the missionary message; African resources and agendas in the midst of massive social upheaval in the early 1900s shape Isaiah Shembe’s use of the Bible.

Chapter 6 shifts the focus from ‘unschooled’ African biblical interpreters to those Africans who have been ‘schooled’ by missionary education and who have become African biblical scholars. Having been schooled in the educational systems of the missionary-colonial enterprise, many of these *kholwa* Africans turn the master’s tools against the master in various ways, one of which is South African Black Theology. Chapter 6, “The Contested Bible”, examines in detail the use of the Bible in the Black struggle for liberation from colonisation and apartheid in South Africa during the period from the early 1970s to the present. For Black Theology the Bible is deeply problematic, being both an intrinsic instrument of domination and oppression as well as a potentially powerful resource for liberation. Central to the discussion in this chapter, as in the book as a whole, is the ongoing issue of African land (and so cattle) in South Africa.

While Black Theology continues to problematise the prevalence of the Bible among Africans, ordinary Africans in every church—whether the historically settler-initiated ‘mainline’ churches, or the older Pentecostal churches, or the

African Independent/Initiated Churches, or the ‘new’ Charismatic churches—have incorporated the Bible into their bodies. It is both a tactile, iconic object of power as well as a textual metanarrative with the potential of providing coherence and shape to African lives. Chapter 7, “The Embodied Bible”, explores how the Bible has been taken up over the past seventy years or so in song, art, and film, as well as in the rhythms of HIV-positive support groups.

Moving from the margins to the centre, Chapter 8, “The Public Bible”, charts the return of the Bible to the public sphere of South African public life after 1994, with the Bible having retreated from the public realm during the final days of white rule and the early days of liberation. As in so much of this book, economic matters provide the underlying reality from within which the Bible’s South African presence is analysed. So in this chapter we examine how the Bible has been used by the African National Congress-led Alliance both to denationalise and re-nationalise South Africa, focussing on the deployment of the Bible by leading public figures like Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, and Cyril Ramaphosa amidst the political and economic forces that constitute post-apartheid South Africa.

The book concludes with an Epilogue, “The Iconic Bible”, in which we reflect on residual prophetic impulses that may be revived in the ongoing struggle for economic freedom in the life-time of contemporary South Africans. The Epilogue reminds readers that the Bible’s problematic presence in South Africa invites both an academic and an activist engagement.

The story told in this book follows a historical and a geographical path, beginning in the early 1600s on the coastal periphery of Southern Africa and continuing into the present, following the local African trade routes into the African interior, as first Africans and then European traders, explorers, and missionaries venture along these paths in the late 1700s. From this African controlled interior, the story of this book connects with the many migratory Africans who travel in the late 1800s and early 1900s between the diamond and gold mines of the increasingly colonised interior and the coastal areas of KwaZulu-Natal. From there we branch out in various directions, documenting how many other Africans of all kinds have transacted with the Bible from the 1940s to the present.

The story also follows a socio-political path, beginning with a Bible that is on the very periphery of African life, but concluding with a Bible that has moved to the very centre of not only African religio-cultural life, but also African political-economic life. The story follows the Bible from African autonomy, to African colony, to African post-colony.

The story is a hermeneutical story, reflecting on why and how and the Bible is ‘used’ by Southern Africans. And though there is an historical orientation to the story told, the prepositional phrase ‘from . . . to’ in the sub-title “From Tool

of Imperialism to African Icon” should be understood to signify range, along a continuum, within and across Southern Africa’s ‘entangled’ time.⁶

The story told here is about *the Bible*. Following the African American biblical scholar Vincent Wimbush, this account separates the reception and appropriation of the Bible from the reception and appropriation of missionary and colonial Christianity.⁷ This is a departure from the tendency in historical and anthropological work on missionary-colonial Christianity to subsume the Bible under ‘Christianity’. My argument here is similar, but with a twist of perspective, to that put forward by Paul Landau, when he argues that historians of religion have too readily subsumed indigenous practices into religious categories that make sense to European researchers generally and missionary Christianity in particular.⁸ Not being biblical scholars, and having accepted the general shape of the Christian metanarrative, most scholars of the colonial and post-colonial have taken for granted that the Bible is analytically, in the philosophical sense, bound up with being Christian.⁹ But why should Southern Africans, who encountered the Bible before the Christian metanarrative had taken root in African soil, perceive the order of things in the same way?¹⁰

6 Achille Mbembe refers to the “time of African existence” as “the *time of entanglement*”, a time that is “not a series but an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones”; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16.

7 Wimbush, “The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretative History,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Wimbush, “Reading Texts through Worlds, Worlds through Texts,” *Semeia* 62(1993). There are echoes across the chapters in this book of other elements of Wimbush’s emerging project; see Wimbush, “Reading Texts as Reading Ourselves: A Chapter in the History of African-American Biblical Interpretation,” in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (eds. Segovia and Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Wimbush, *The Bible and African Americans: A Brief History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Wimbush, *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Wimbush and Rodman, *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

8 Landau, “‘Religion’ and Christian Conversion in African History: A New Model,” *Journal of Religious History* 23, no. 1 (1999). I am also engaged in examining what Landau elsewhere calls the “interpretive situation” of Southern Africans; Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), xxi, note 13.

9 Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1980), 52.

10 There is a deliberate allusion here to Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973).

Furthermore, if early encounters with sacred objects such as a the Bible might function “as phenomenological, socio-political and cultural foundation” for subsequent periods,¹¹ as Wimbush argues, analysing the array of interpretative strategies forged in the earliest encounters of Southern Africans with the Bible has contemporary hermeneutical significance.

In telling the story of the stolen Bible I use African primary materials wherever possible, and where we have to draw on missionary-colonial narratives I read them for the African voices they encode, for, as Itumeleng Mosala reminds us, “the appropriation of works and events is always a contradictory process embodying in some form a ‘struggle’”.¹² The story *The Stolen Bible* tells is an African story, although other characters play key roles in the recounting of the story. As the story unfolds historically, the primary material that is the basis for this book shifts, as African voices increasingly speak for themselves.¹³ Throughout the telling of the story of *The Stolen Bible* I am vigilant about foregrounding ‘voice’, and so there is a continual shifting of voice among the many quotations, reminding us of the re-presentation of which *The Stolen Bible* partakes. Indeed, the extensive quotation, multiplying the voices present, deconstructs the notion of a single metanarrative of the African Bible arching across the centuries from 1652 to 2015. The story of the *The Stolen Bible* is not one story but many stories. The detail (and duration) of these stories is the story of *The Stolen Bible*.

While postcolonial studies are generally embarrassed by religion in general,¹⁴ and the Bible in particular,¹⁵ refusing their direct gaze, this is not the case here. As J.D.Y. Peel has argued so elegantly,

The challenge of producing a cogent account of religious change in any part of Africa over the last two centuries lies in how to blend the three narrative themes which are pertinent to it: missionary endeavor, colonization, and the endogenous development of African societies. Each of

11 Wimbush, “Reading Texts through Worlds, Worlds through Texts,” 131.

12 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 32.

13 AICS, *Speaking for Ourselves* (Braamfontein: Institute for Contextual Theology, 1985).

14 Brown, “Religion, Spirituality and the Postcolonial: A Perspective from the South,” in *Religion and Spirituality in South Africa: New Perspectives* (ed. Brown; Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009); see also Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 337–338.

15 Boer ed., *A Vanishing Mediator? The Presence/Absence of the Bible in Postcolonialism* (*Semeia* 88) (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

these offers a template by which certain key relationships are highlighted and (by the same token) others are pushed into the background.¹⁶

As in Peel's own account of the "mutual engagement" of Christianity and the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria,¹⁷ I too emphasise the African narrative. The other narratives are not dismissed, but are assigned a more minor, supporting, role. From the African perspective the religious change that takes place under the catalytic impact of missionary-colonialism is "conceived of less as the outcome of an encounter between two cultures or religions than as a matter of cognitive and practical adjustment to changes in social experience, within the terms of an existing [African] paradigm".¹⁸

However, this emphasis on the African narrative strand should not neglect the narrative power of Christianity and the Bible, both "vehicles of trans-historical memory".¹⁹ My analysis, therefore, seeks to ground the story of the stolen Bible in *Southern African* religion and history, while not neglecting the specific ways in which it also belongs to the *Christian* and, more specifically, *biblical* story.²⁰ But, as I have said, while Peel and some other scholars recognise the importance of religion in the encounter between Christianity, colonialism, and indigenous African society, they tend to assume that the reception of the Bible is part and parcel of the reception of Christianity.²¹ The story of the stolen Bible is a more nuanced story, and while its story participates in other stories, its own story deserves to be told. There is a distinct Bible.

16 Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2.

17 Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 1.

18 Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 3.

19 Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 9.

20 See Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 9.

21 Boer, *A Vanishing Mediator?*; West, "Early Encounters with the Bible among the Batlhaping: Historical and Hermeneutical Signs," *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004).

Prologue: The African Bible

You come with edicts of emperors, we hold nothing in our hands but volumes of scriptures.¹

The reception of the Bible in Africa is both very ancient and very recent. Indeed, North Africa forms part of the cradle that gave birth to the Bible, participating in the production of the Bible as we now have it. But the story in Sub-Saharan or Tropical Africa is quite different, with the Bible being a relatively recent arrival. That Africa can be divided in this way reflects the historical, geographical, and ideological ambiguity of the designation 'Africa'. That the Bible is both organic to Africa and a foreign artefact brought to Africa reflects the ambiguity of the designation 'Bible'.

The African Bible: Mediterranean North Africa

North Africa is part of the Mediterranean world in which the Bible was born.² This is evident, for example, in the presence of Africans and Africa in the Bible. In the ancestral stories in Genesis of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob and his family, Egypt is a part of the setting, with these biblical characters moving in and out of Africa. And Africans are also characters in the Bible. Numbers 12:1, for example, may indicate that Moses had a second wife who came from Cush/Kush, a region in North Africa.³ There is also the well known story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (1 Kings 10:1–3). This popular story is found not only in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, but also in the New Testament (Matthew 12:42//Luke 11:31), in Josephus' *Antiquities* (8.10.2 §158; 8.10.5–6 §§165–175), in the Qur'an (27:15–44) and in the Ethiopian national epic, *Kebra Negast* (Glory of the Kings).⁴

1 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 37.

2 Yorke, "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afrocentric Perspective," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 52(1995): 9; Burton, *The Blessing of Africa* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2007), 17–55.

3 Adamo, "Ethiopia in the Bible," *African Christian Studies* 8, no. 11 (1992); Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 93–114; Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 35–75.

4 Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 100–105.

Alongside this presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible is the impact of Africa and Africans on the formation of the Bible and interpretation of the Bible. Mediterranean Africa had a marked effect on the Bible, both in terms of the actual formation of the Bible and in terms of its interpretation. For example, the sacred texts of the Jews travelled with the waves of Jewish refugees displaced by the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BCE and the Babylonian occupation of the southern kingdom of Judah in 587 BCE, with many of them settling in North Africa, along the Mediterranean coast from Libya in the west to Egypt in the east, and south along the Nile into Nubia/Sudan and Ethiopia.⁵ Under the Ptolemies more Jews moved into Egypt and North Africa, some settling there for reasons of trade, while others were relocated prisoners of Ptolemaic wars in Palestine. By the first century AD it is estimated that Jews formed ten to fifteen per cent of the population in Egypt.⁶ The Jewish community in Alexandria was among the most prominent of the Jewish diaspora, producing a range of literature in Hebrew and Greek. Among the most significant for biblical reception was the Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint. The traditional story is that seventy-two or seventy (hence the shorthand 'LXX') learned Jews were sent to Egypt at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BCE) to translate the Jewish law (Torah, the Pentateuch) into Greek for the library in Alexandria.

The advent of the Roman empire, like the Greek empire it consumed and replaced, had a marked impact on Mediterranean North Africa and on its reception of the Bible. With the eventual conquest of Carthage, a Phoenician colony, in about 146 BCE, North Africa became part of the Roman empire. Indeed, the designation 'Africa' probably derives from Roman usage.⁷ North African Judaism, as part of a wider Jewish response to unjust Roman government and the corrosive effect of Hellenistic cultural hegemony, made its contribution, with Alexandria once again being a site of biblical production and interpretation, and with scholars such as Philo (20 BCE–CE 50), an Alexandrian Jew, using a fusion of biblical and Platonic philosophical traditions to defend his community and Judaism against Roman anti-Semitic attitudes and attacks.⁸

It is not clear how and when Christianity came to Roman North Africa, but what is clear is that there were distinctive features of this form of 'African'

5 Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), 4.

6 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 16.

7 Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 40.

8 Saldarini, "Jewish Responses to Greco-Roman Culture, 332 BCE to 200 CE," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible* (eds. Kee, et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 407.

Christianity, some of which derived from local religious and cultural traditions and some of which are directly related to their interpretation of the Bible.⁹ For example, sustained Roman persecution of Christianity, considered by Romans a religion of “the servile classes”¹⁰ and of “social outcasts and traitors who reject our [Greek and Roman] ancient and proud cultural heritage”,¹¹ led to differing responses from Christian communities, among which were the Donatists of North Africa. A number of North African and Libyan bishops, including Donatus, claimed that only they had remained true to the Christian God and “confessed Christ” during the Great Persecution, even though it usually meant torture and exile or death. Other priests and bishops, they claimed, had bowed to Roman pressure and had performed sacrifices to the Roman gods, thus betraying Christ and the Christian God.¹² But the surest sign that they were *traditores* (‘betrayers’) was that they had “handed over” the Holy Scriptures to be burned in order to placate the demands of the pagan state!¹³ Later, when confronted by the emissaries of the emperor Constantine, the Donatists again resisted incorporation, proclaiming: “You come with edicts of emperors, we hold nothing in our hands but volumes of scriptures”.¹⁴

The scriptures continued to play an important part in African receptions of the Bible through the work of North African theologians like Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 212),¹⁵ Origen (185–254),¹⁶ Cyprian (ca. 200–258),¹⁷ and Augustine (354–430).¹⁸ But these were all Africans of a particular kind, orientated as they were to the Mediterranean world. Further inland other Africans were also engaging with the Bible.

9 Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 20.

10 Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 124.

11 Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 57.

12 Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 104.

13 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 10.

14 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 37.

15 Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 20–28.

16 Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 50–51.

17 Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 28–41.

18 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 24.

The African Bible: Coptic, Nubian, and Ethiopian North Africa

While the city of Alexandria looked north to the cosmopolitan Mediterranean and Greek cultural world, the rural regions of Egypt, with its emerging Coptic language and culture, looked to the desert hinterland. Eusebius suggests that the See of Alexandria was founded by St Mark the Evangelist in 68 CE while preaching the gospel there, and though the Coptic Orthodox Church still counts St Mark as their founder, it is the “era of the martyrs” brought about by the accession of Diocletian (284) that inaugurated Coptic church history. Even today, the Coptic calendar begins not with the birth of Christ but with AD 284.¹⁹ And it is this foundational experience which indelibly characterises their biblical interpretation.

Further south, and only recently uncovered archaeologically (1959–1969), the thousand years (about 450–1450) of Nubia’s Christian history remain something of a mystery.²⁰ Northern Nubia was probably first made known of Christianity in about 450, possibly by Coptic monks or Coptic refugees who were making their way along the Nile.²¹ To a much larger extent than in Egypt, Nubia’s church history was that of kings and the aristocracy, and it is not clear to what extent Christianity was embraced by the masses.²²

Just as the Nile facilitated the expansion of Christianity from the delta region to Upper Egypt and to the three kingdoms of Nubia, so the Red Sea enabled contact between the Semitic peoples of south-western Arabian coast and the northern Cushite communities of Ethiopia (or Aksum). For at least a thousand years before Christ, people had migrated from southern Arabia into northern Ethiopia.²³ In this region, as in most others, the spread of Christianity was largely due to traders and refugees, though church history tends to notice those with formal authority, such as Frumentius, a traveller who was taken into the court of King Ella-Amida at Aksum, where he enabled a Christian presence to be established. He was later, between 341–346, consecrated as bishop of the church in Ethiopia by Patriarch Athanasius of Egypt. The ecclesiastical links between Egypt and Ethiopia would last for another 1,600 years.²⁴

Though significantly diverse, there are many ‘family resemblances’ with respect to biblical interpretation across Mediterranean North African and

19 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 10–11.

20 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 30.

21 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 30.

22 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 32.

23 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 35.

24 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 35.

Coptic, Nubian, and Ethiopian North Africa. Common to these northern parts of Africa was and is an emphasis on the intratextual unity of scripture and its allegorical and typological relevance to the Christian community. All of scripture, as well as the lives of saints and martyrs, is primarily about instructing the believer in the spiritual life. Though similar elements can be found in African biblical reception in Sub-Saharan Africa, there was little direct contact between them. Geography was a part of the problem. The eastern regions of North Africa had the two parallel waterways of the River Nile and the Red Sea along which travel could easily take place from Egypt south and east through Nubia and Ethiopia, but the western areas of North Africa were populated only along a narrow coastal belt, separated from the interior by impenetrable forests and the deserts.²⁵ Language too was a problem. In the western areas of North Africa, for example, the orientation in the church was to Greek and Latin, and not to Berber. The overall socio-cultural and theological orientation across North Africa, when it was not turned inwards, was towards the north and east, not towards the south.

But other factors were also at work. In 426 Augustine writes of “hordes of African barbarians, plundering and destroying”,²⁶ and a few years later, in 429, the Vandal king, Gaiseric, brought his Gothic tribe across France and Spain and into North Africa, conquering Carthage in 439 and settling in Tunisia, where they ruled for more than a century. Having adopted an Arian form of Christianity on their way across Europe, they persecuted Catholics and Donatists in North Africa.²⁷ The Vandals were themselves overthrown by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in 533, and left no lasting influence, though they did substantially weaken the Roman African Christianity, allowing for the resurgence of independent Christian Berber kingdoms. Byzantine North Africa was larger than the Vandal kingdom, though smaller than Roman North Africa, but by the seventh century there are archaeological signs that this Christian empire too was in decline.²⁸ Then in 639, seven years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, an Arab force invaded Egypt. At this stage it was not clear that Islam was a new religion, with many regarding the ‘Ishmaelites’ as a Christian sect.²⁹ The Arabs conquered Byzantine Africa between 670 and 750, with most of the resistance coming from independent Berbers. North-west

25 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 29.

26 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 42.

27 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 42; Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 28.

28 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 42.

29 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 43.

Africa, which the Arabs called 'the Maghrib' (the West), gradually lost its Christian identity, weakened by internal sectarian divisions, class-conflict between the wealthy clergy and the poor masses, an urban-Christian/rural-traditional-religion divide, and successive invasions. In addition, north-west Africa lacked a monastic tradition, which did so much to sustain Christianity in Egypt and Ethiopia. But even in the east, the Christian majority in Egypt began to decline, due in part to successive waves of Arab Muslim immigration and persecution under the Mamluks, from the mid-thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, which in turn was fueled by the aggression of the Crusaders, who, at various times, proposed blockading the Red Sea, or diverting the Nile.³⁰

The spread of Islam in Arabia, Egypt, Nubia, and throughout the Near East, led to increasing isolation of Christian Ethiopia. Even though 'Ethiopia' extended much further south than Aksum had done, its thoroughly African yet 'primitive' Christianity, with strong Hebraic influences, remained confined, in the main, to Ethio-semitic speaking peoples of the highlands. The early relationships between Muslims and Christians were amiable, with the king of Aksum giving sanctuary to some of the first Muslims who were fleeing from a hostile Mecca, allowing Muslim merchants to settle on the coastal plains. However, peaceful co-existence gave way to war in the early sixteenth century, when a dynamic Muslim leader, Imam Ahmad, arose in Adal, to the east, and nearly succeeded in overthrowing the Christian kingdom.³¹ It was at this juncture that Ethiopia came into contact with Portuguese emissaries, and though Ethiopia was deeply ambivalent, both desiring European assistance and fearing "the threat to their religion and independence", they accepted Portuguese support in defeating Ahmad's forces in 1543.³² This ambivalence to the emerging European presence in Africa would characterise how Africans engaged with the Bible further south, where Christianity and the Bible had yet to arrive.

The Imperial Bible: Sub-Saharan or Tropical Africa

"The first Portuguese ships anchored off the coast of the west-central African kingdom of Kongo in 1483".³³ So begins the story of modern European interest in Africa. Slavery was the initial, and for long periods, the sustaining interest in Africa, with the first black Africans being sold into slavery in Portugal in the

30 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 43–44.

31 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 46–51.

32 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 51.

33 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 45.

1440s. From 1490–1530 between three hundred and two thousand slaves were brought annually to Lisbon from as far south as the Upper and Lower Guinea coast.³⁴ But geo-political shifts in power generated imperial interest in other parts of Africa. The fall of Constantinople in 1453, and the news that the Hagia Sophia had been turned into a mosque, together with significant technological advancements in seafaring, precipitated the search for a new passage to the East over the seas.³⁵ The interest in Africa now extended to a series of places along the coast to replenish supplies on the way to somewhere else. But gradually interest shifted to the interior, in search of still more slaves and other commodities desired by European empires.

While the Bible has always, in some sense, been associated with North Africa, the same is not true for Sub-Saharan Africa. The Bible was brought to these parts of Africa relatively recently, initially (1415–1787) with the wave of explorers, traders, and ecclesial representatives of the medieval Catholic Church, directed by Portugal. In 1493 Pope Alexander VI (Borgia), a Spaniard, divided the world in two, assigning the West to Spain and the East, including Africa, to Portugal.³⁶ King Manuel ‘the Great’ (1495–1521), aided by a form of missionary Tribunal made up of theologians and members of the orders of knighthood, embarked on a national-ecclesiastical enterprise in which Africa was a resource to be consumed by ‘*conquista* Christianity’.³⁷ Crusading for “pepper and souls”, in the words of Vasco da Gama, this emergent *conquista* idea of Christian mission took root along the coast-lines of Africa and India, incorporating both political and spiritual conquest.³⁸ Slave and trade posts, with chaplains in attendance, were established at various strategic sites on the West African coast, at the mouth of the Zaire River (providing access to the Kongo), at Mpinda in Soyo, at Luanda in Angola, at the Cape, at a number of sites on the East African coast, and at Massawa in Ethiopia.³⁹

This first wave of European mission, characterised by a particular form of imperial Christianity, was followed by a second wave, characterised at first by “literally hundreds of European conquests of Africa”,⁴⁰ and then by the more systematic European ‘scramble’ for Africa, precipitated by the Berlin

34 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 42.

35 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 42.

36 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 44.

37 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 44–45.

38 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 45.

39 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 52–73; Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 45–80.

40 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 97.

Congress of 1885.⁴¹ The Roman Catholic mission presence in Western, Central, and Southern Africa in the early the late 1700s and 1800s was almost entirely French (with an Italian Catholic presence along the Nile in North-East Africa). Besides being the vanguard of French trade and colonialism, an explicit aspect of their missionary work was to teach their converts and inspire in them “a great affection for the Fathers of the Church in Africa”.⁴² The formation of the Sacra de Propaganda Fide in 1662, and the founding of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith in 1822 gave further impetus to Catholic mission.⁴³ During this same period vast numbers of Protestant missionaries moved into Africa, and while some were independent of direct support by a missionary organisation, the majority belonged to an array of missionary societies, so that by 1910 there were an estimated one and half million European Protestant Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁴ The impetus for this Protestant missionary movement into Africa was the formation of a number of missionary agencies: the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (1698), the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the Wesleyan Methodist Society (1813), and the Netherlands Missionary Society (1797).

As the slave trade began to be replaced by trade in other goods towards the end of the nineteenth century, a shift brought about as much by the agricultural efforts of the large slave populations in West Africa as by the abolitionist movement,⁴⁵ so the European missionary imagination sought to emulate and cooperate with companies like the East India Company and the Dutch East India Company.⁴⁶ As Catholic imperial control of the seas loosened, so the way was cleared for Protestant Holland and England to construct their empires, inspired by the possibilities of trade and their newly rediscovered, post-Reformation, Bible.⁴⁷ Precipitated, perhaps, by the Baptist William Carey’s (1761–1834) interpretation of Matthew 28:19 as a command to preach the gospel in distant lands,⁴⁸ a number of biblical texts were interpreted as a mandate to explore, convert, civilise, and colonise. It was not until this period of

41 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 97.

42 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 105.

43 Sugirtharajah, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 103.

44 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 84.

45 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 97–98.

46 Sugirtharajah, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction,” 103.

47 Sugirtharajah, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction,” 104.

48 Sugirtharajah, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction,” 96.

Protestant mission, for example, that the book of Acts was read as containing a missionary-journey pattern and mandate.⁴⁹

This second wave, of modern nineteenth century Catholic and Protestant missionary and imperial Christianity (1787–1919), did not find an undisturbed territory. Sub-Saharan Africa was already in flux, with large population movements and migrations across the sub-continent, propelled by the innumerable European incursions from the African coast for slaves and by local struggles for control of resources, such as the *Mfecane* in Southern Africa, in which the rise of King Shaka and the expansion of the Zulu state in the eastern region of Southern Africa, the resistance of African chiefdoms to the efforts of the Portugese at Delagoa Bay who were pushing south in the search for slaves, and raiding parties of Griquas and Bergenaars from the south to meet the demand for bonded labour in the Cape Colony set up a series of chain reactions among neighbouring clans.⁵⁰ Not only did these movements of Africans themselves become carriers of Christianity and the Bible, the social upheavals generated both by external and internal forces produced a whole range of dislocated groups and individuals who were willing to engage with the new formations brought about by Christianity, its book, and other associated goods of power.

The third wave (1920–1959) of missionary-colonial influence in Sub-Saharan Africa is closely related to the second, but can be considered as the transition from a colonial period to that of the independent African state. While the First and Second World War had a significant impact on Africa, particularly the First World War, much of which was fought on African soil, drawing millions of Africans into the conflict, either directly as soldiers or indirectly as carriers and labourers,⁵¹ these two ‘white-mens’ wars’ destabilised and ultimately deconstructed the European myth of empire and civilisation. In the wake of the First World War, the ‘Missionary Popes’ Benedict xv and Pius xi stressed the need for an educated African clergy who would take over the leadership of the churches in their respective countries.⁵² Up until the early 1900s ninety percent of all village education was mission schooling, whether Catholic or Protestant, and the form this schooling took was an extension of the catechumens’ class. However, this changed between 1920 and 1945, during which period schools now became the concern of colonial governments, intent on training a loyal native elite who

49 Sugirtharajah, “A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction,” 100–101.

50 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 167–169.

51 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 610–612.

52 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 626.

would form the core of a native administration.⁵³ Across villages and towns in Sub-Saharan Africa, first the mission educated African and then the African educated by the colonial government “began to act as a local or regional centre of opposition”.⁵⁴ Some became the leaders of missionary established churches, others founded African Independent Churches, and others founded liberation movements, each in their own diverse ways providing sites of opposition and resistance. Central to each site was a foundational vernacular book, the Bible, and through it African Christianity began ‘to talk back’ to power.

Throughout these waves of imperialism and mission the Bible was present, playing a variety of roles, from iconic object of power, to aural authority, to vernacular textbook, to the medicine of God’s Word, to political weapon of struggle, to tool for post liberation consolidation. Though the forms of its reception and interpretation are as diverse and distinct as the particular African contexts within which it was engaged, there are significant family resemblances across the receptions of the Bible in Sub-Saharan Africa. While recognising and engaging with these resonances across Sub-Saharan Africa, our focus in this book will be on Southern Africa.

And while the North African Bible has been painted here with broad strokes, analysing the Southern African Bible will require more attention to detail, reflecting on particular socio-historical Southern African sites of reception and re-membering of the Bible. For while the North African Bible is inseparable from the socio-religious forms that produced it, the Southern African Bible could be understood as separable from the Christianity of the settler-colonial and missionary-colonial sectors that brought the Bible to Southern Africa.

53 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 636–637.

54 Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 608.

The Imperial Bible

There is also, it seems, a better prospect of propagating the word of God amongst these people in the course of time, since the foundation of religious knowledge have been laid in Eva, and by means of her are already being spread and imparted from time to time among her people.¹

The Bible that reached Ethiopia in Portugese ships, in 1543, was among the many Bibles in imperial ships that navigated the passage around the Cape, the southern most tip of the African continent. But it is only in 1652 that the Bible settles in Southern Africa, becoming an integral element in the establishment of a refreshment station on the trade route between Holland and the East.

Subordinated to the imperial trade enterprise, the Bible is carefully constrained, restricted to the use of particular imperial personnel and intended for European consumption. The Bible was not among the items intended for trade. African engagement with this Bible would be incidental to the primary purpose of trade. The ships that paused for refreshment at the Cape were the ships of the *De Vereenichde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (voc) (Dutch East India Company), which was founded in 1602 by rich merchants of several Dutch cities, becoming “a state within a state”.² Trade was their highest purpose. God and the Bible were subordinate to this primary purpose; for so the record reflects.³

The (primary) record referred to here is the Company Journal (*Daghregister*) from the Cape, a requirement of each of the Company’s possessions,⁴ in which the daily routines and rhythms of the Company were recorded. The Journal has come to be known as the *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, after the first Commander at the Cape. But it is important to state that the Journal is not the personal

1 Thom ed, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol III* (III vols.; Cape Town and Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, for The Van Riebeeck Society, 1952), 80.

2 Thom ed, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I* (III vols.; Cape Town and Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, for The Van Riebeeck Society, 1952), xix.

3 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, xxii.

4 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, xxvi–xxxii. In the period of Van Riebeeck’s administration the Journal also included an array of other documents, copies of letters, resolutions of the Council of Policy, reports of expeditions, etc. In this respect it is quite a comprehensive account.

diary of Jan Van Riebeeck. The Journal was an official document, and it was a requirement of each and every one of the Company's stations. It had to be compiled at the Cape, but it was not a requirement that the Commander compile it himself. But it was the Commander's duty to ensure that the record was being kept.⁵

Jan Van Riebeeck looms large in the histories of South Africa, especially the histories of the period before 1994 (which signals the political liberation of South Africa from colonialism in general and apartheid colonialism in particular). The history book I underlined as part of my Christian National Education in my first year of high school (1969) began the history of South Africa with the account of the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck. The 6th April 1652 was a date all white South Africans were instructed to remember. Even the critical edition of the Journal used for this research betrays, in its Introduction and its footnotes, this legacy.⁶

And as recently as January 2015, the South African President, Jacob Zuma, speaking at an African National Congress (ANC) event said: "A man with the name of Jan Van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape on April 6 1652 . . . What followed were numerous struggles and wars and deaths and the seizure of land and the deprivation of the indigenous peoples' political and economic power . . . The arrival of Van Riebeeck disrupted SA's social cohesion, repressed people and caused wars".⁷ The next day, at an ANC rally, "a praise singer told the crowd that he needed to exorcise the spirit of Dutch coloniser Jan Van Riebeeck before the rally could get underway", saying "I have to clear the spirit of Jan Van Riebeeck from this place first".⁸

The focus of this chapter is not on Van Riebeeck but on the Company's Journal and its representation of religion in general and the Bible in particular. The focus is on the mundane, the regular entries of every day as the Company's project at the Cape takes shape.

Trade, not 'settlement' in any strong sense, was the primary purpose. The public purpose was to establish a refreshment station to sustain and expedite the Company's trade. Trade with local Africans at the Cape was an integral

5 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, xxvi–xxvii, xxxv. The Council of Seventeen decreed in 1621 that a Journal be kept as every one of the Company's stations. Of prime importance was a detailed and diligent record of day-to-day transactions, particularly with respect to the English and other European trading rivals.

6 See for example Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, xxxviii–xxxix.

7 Steward, "Zuma Is the President of All South Africans," *Business Day*, 26 January 2015.

8 SAPA, "Let's Exorcise Spirit of Jan Van Riebeeck First': Praise Singer Tells Crowd at ANC Rally," *TimesLIVE*, 10 January 2015.

part of the project. Africans were part of the larger chain of trade, extending from Europe to the East and from the Cape to the Interior. But local African agency would have its say in how this was configured. We will proceed slowly, for it is only the careful attention to slow detail that exposes the lineaments of 'colonialism', and religion's part in it. A slow attention to the detail of each day is also necessary in order for us to recognise that 'colonialism' is not self-evidently present with the arrival of the Company. It is Africans who control the Cape, not Van Riebeeck or the Dutch East India Company.

The Empires' Bibles: Portuguese East Africa and Dutch South Africa

The 'settling' of the Bible in South Africa in 1652 was not the first attempt to establish a 'Christian' presence in the southern part of Africa. Allied to the Portuguese imperial project, first the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1561 and then the Order of St. Dominic (Dominicans) in 1577 played a role in securing Portuguese control of the trade routes by 'converting' (usually in the form of mass baptisms) local Africans, thereby attempting to exercise some authority over them and by so doing to wrest control from the "infernal sect of Mohamed", referring to the Arab-Swahili traders who were running bazaars in the Mutapa kingdom and who controlled the trade routes in the region.⁹

As with the Dutch settlers at the Cape, religion was a part of the fabric of the imperial Portuguese trade project,¹⁰ though the Catholic religious orders had their own agendas as well.¹¹ However, it is difficult to detect in the available records a distinctive place for the Bible in the complex interplay between the Portuguese kingdom, the religious orders, and the local African peoples. This is not surprisingly given the place of the Bible within the Roman Catholicism of this time. What is perhaps more surprising is that the Bible is not as prominent as one might expect in the Protestant equivalent, the Dutch imperial-missionary project in South Africa. The Bible is a constrained presence in the ordinary religion of the early Dutch traders and settlers.

9 Nicolaides, "Early Portuguese Imperialism: Using the Jesuits in the Mutapa Empire of Zimbabwe," *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies* 2, no. 4 (2011): 134; Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa: A Social History (1577–1990)* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 2.

10 Nicolaides, "Early Portuguese Imperialism."

11 Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa*, 1–65. See also Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), 7–18.

The Dutch imperial project at the Cape began inauspiciously, with a shipwreck. In the words of Johannes du Plessis, a chronicler of Christian missions in Southern Africa writing in the early 1900s:

It is a remarkable fact that a century and a half had elapsed since Antonio de Saldanha first cast anchor in Table Bay, before any maritime Power seriously considered the question of establishing a permanent settlement there. Some talk there had indeed been of building a fort, which it was proposed should be constructed jointly by the English and the Dutch East India Companies, and two English captains had gone so far as to plant the English flag on what is now known as Lion's Rump, but no fort was erected and no settlement commenced. Table Bay was no more than a halfway-house between Europe and the East Indies, at which outward- or homeward-bound vessels would halt for a few days or a few weeks, to replenish their supply of fresh water, and secure such cattle as they could obtain by barter from the natives.¹²

This was to change when in 1648 the Dutch East Indiaman *Haerlem* was wrecked on the north-eastern shore of Table Bay. Having survived and established temporary huts, the crew were well received by the local Africans. Though anticipating the need for protection, none was needed; the local Africans provided for the shipwrecked crew and embarked on trade with them, bartering cattle and sheep for the goods that the crew had been able to salvage from their ship.¹³ “[A]nd when at length the homeward fleet took them away, they carried with them the happiest recollections of their enforced stay.”¹⁴

On their arrival in Holland, two of the returning crew of the *Haerlem* drew up a document, dated 26 July 1649, headed: “Remonstrance, in which is briefly set forth and explained the service, advantage and profit which will accrue to the United Chartered East India Company, from making a Fort and Garden at the *Cabo de Boa Esperance*.”¹⁵ Here, and in this book as a whole, I follow the narrative left-to-right logic of the primary sources, regularly interrupting their flow to interrogate their gaps, reading deconstructively against the grain in order to hear local African voices. The “Remonstrance” is a fairly lengthy and carefully argued document.

¹² Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 19.

¹³ Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 19.

¹⁴ Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 20.

¹⁵ Moodie, *The Record; or, a Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa* (Capetown: A.S. Robertson, 1838), 1.

Notwithstanding, Honorable Sirs, that it is well known to us, that many and divers persons, even among those who have several times frequented the *Cabo de Boa Esperance*, without, however, taking any notice of the situation or fitness of the country—will pretend and say, some, that the place is unsuitable, and consequently, that the cost—seeing that there is nothing to be had there, except water and a little scurvy grass—would be needless and thrown away; others, that the Honorable Company has Forts and places enough, aye, more than too many to provide for, and therefore ought not to establish any more; we shall, however, point out to your Honors, as briefly and simply as our poor ability will permit, not only how useful and necessary the formation of the said Fort and Garden will be, for the preservation of the Company's ships and people, but that the same may be effected, without expense, and with profit and gain.¹⁶

Leendert Janz and Nicolaas Proot, the authors of the document, then go on to argue that a small workforce of “sixty to seventy, as well soldiers as sailors, and a few persons acquainted with gardening and horticulture—could raise, as well for the ships and the people bound for India, as for those returning thence, many kinds of fruit, as will hereafter be more particularly demonstrated”.¹⁷ They then go on to explain carefully what kinds of fruit and vegetables could be grown in the particular soil type at the Cape and with the available water. This would supplement, they continue, the benefits already derived “by the sick, as well as the healthy, from the little scurvy grass, and sometimes two or three cattle, now procured at the Cape by the ships bound for India”.¹⁸

Though emphasising the positives of their proposal, there is already a hint here of the uncertainty that surrounds cattle at the Cape. The word ‘sometimes’ is significant. Fruit and vegetables are certain, cattle less so. As cattle are a key concern of and a central concept within the argument of my book, cattle (and the land they require) will form a focus of my analysis of this and other sources. And Janz and Proot do go on to deal with cattle, urging:

Be pleased then to consider for a moment, Honorable Sirs, the multitude of sick, who, with God's blessing, might be restored to health, if all the fruits above-mentioned were to be had there in abundance and superfluity, especially if we previously procured, by barter from the natives, a great quantity of cattle and sheep, which are to had at a sufficiently cheap

¹⁶ Moodie, *The Record*, 1.

¹⁷ Moodie, *The Record*, 1.

¹⁸ Moodie, *The Record*, 1.

rate, and from which we could also procure cheese, butter, and milk, for refreshment.¹⁹

Having made the point that “the Commanders of the ships . . . who are often well supplied with every comfort for the cabin” and who are concerned more about “the appointed premium, than for the promotion of the Company’s service” tend to bypass the Cape “when they do not hit upon the Cape as they intended”, Janz and Proot make the argument that a compulsory stop-over at a refreshment station at the Cape would benefit not only the ordinary sailors, whom they add, become sick “for months without doing any work, but drawing wages notwithstanding”, but consequently also the profits of the Company.²⁰ Janz and Proot here deftly balance their own concerns for the well-being of ordinary sailors such as themselves and what they know matters to the Company most, profit.

Returning to the question, which “[s]ome may ask, by whom this garden is to be cultivated?”, they reply that “that if three or four gardeners are brought from Holland, enough can be found among the sailors and soldiers who can dig and delve; some Chinese might also be brought from Batavia;²¹ they are industrious people, most of them understand gardening, and there are always enough of them in irons”.²² They then offer a detailed estimate of the costs, ‘balancing’ “the expenses which the Company must incur, against the expected and evident profits”.²³ This listing of expenses and profits brings them to the local African people of the Cape and their cattle:

Others will say that the natives are savages and cannibals, and that no good is to be expected from them, but that we must be always on our guard. This, however, is only a popular error . . . as the contrary shall be fully shown, but that they are without laws and civil policy, such as many Indians have, is not denied; that some of our soldiers and sailors have also been beaten to death by them, is indeed true; but the reasons why, are, for the exculpation of our people who give them cause, always concealed; for we firmly believe, that the farmers in this country [Holland], were we

19 Moodie, *The Record*, 1.

20 Moodie, *The Record*, 2.

21 Blussé, “Batavia, 1619–1740: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Colonial Town,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1981).

22 Moodie, *The Record*, 2–3.

23 Moodie, *The Record*, 3.

to shoot their cattle or take them away without payment, if they had no justice to fear, would not be an hair better than these natives.²⁴

While acknowledging that there is already a history at the Cape of contestation over cattle, Janz and Proot concentrate on their own positive experience at the Cape, stating, “We, of the said ship *Haarlem*,²⁵ testify wholly to the contrary, for the natives, after we had lain there five months, came daily to the Fort which we had thrown up for our defence, to trade, with perfect amity, and brought cattle and sheep in quantities”.²⁶ Indeed, they continue, some of those from the *Haerlem* even visited “the houses of the natives, and where they at that time resided, and they were received and treated in a friendly manner”.²⁷ Rejecting the claims by some of cannibalism among the South African natives, they insist “that beyond all doubt their killing our people, happens more out of revenge for taking their cattle, than for the purpose of eating them”.²⁸

The solution, as they see it, is “a good commander, who would treat the natives kindly, and pay them thankfully for all that was bought of them”, and if such were the case, “we would not have the slightest cause to fear them”; indeed, they continue, “in time they would learn the Dutch language, and even the natives of the Bay of Saldania [who have extensive cattle herds], and of the interior [who have extensive cattle herds], might through them be brought to some kind of intercourse”.²⁹ Reiterating that there is already evidence among the local African people of a capacity to “speak some words” of Dutch and that “beyond doubt they will learn our language”, Janz and Proot offer another incentive to a Dutch presence at the Cape:

By maintaining a good correspondence with them, we shall be able in time to employ some of their children as boys and servants, and to educate them in the Christian Religion, by which means, if it pleases God

24 Moodie, *The Record*, 3. For examples of conflicts between the indigenous peoples of the Cape and the Portugese, in February 1488 in Mossel Bay and in 1503 in Table Bay, see Villavicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa: A Documentary History* (ed. Suttner; 2 vols.; vol. 1; Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), 3, and then again in Table Bay on the 1st March 1510, commemorated by South African President Thabo Mbeki on the 26th March 1999; see Johnson, *Imagining the Cape Colony: History, Literature, and the South African Nation* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2012), 10.

25 This follows the spelling as given by Moodie.

26 Moodie, *The Record*, 3.

27 Moodie, *The Record*, 4.

28 Moodie, *The Record*, 4.

29 Moodie, *The Record*, 4.

Almighty to bless this good cause, as at Tayouan and Formosa, many souls will be brought to God, and to the Christian Reformed Religion, so that the formation of the said Fort and Garden, will not only tend to the gain and profit of the Honourable Company, but to the preservation and saving of many men's lives, and what is more, to the magnifying of God's holy name, and to the propagation of his gospel, whereby, beyond all doubt, your Honors' trade over all India will be more and more blessed.³⁰

Trade is the primary concern, profit is its god, and profession of the Christian Reformed Religion a hoped for by-product. This proposal was to shape the imperial project entrusted to Jan Van Riebeeck. But there would be other voices urging more caution, including the voice of Jan Van Riebeeck himself, who commented in June of 1651 on the "Remonstrance" by Janz and Proot, and by so doing implicitly offered his own services to the Company by way of reminding them of his own experience at the Cape "in the year 1648", when "your present obedient servant was also about three weeks on shore at the Cape".³¹ Though concentrating on where, in his considered opinion, the fort should be located, he does offer a comment on "the natives", saying that "although Mr. Leendert Janz does not appear to entertain much apprehension of any interruption from the natives, provided they are well treated, I say, notwithstanding, that they are by no means to be trusted, but are a savage set, living without conscience, and therefore the Fort should be rendered tolerably defensible".³² In sum, he says, "we should, therefore, act cautiously with them, and not put much trust in them; and the same in regard of the English, French, Danes, and particularly the Portugese, who are always envious of the increase and extension of the Company's power".³³ He then suggests that for "our greater security there, we might with little, or possibly with no expense, fence the plantations and pasture grounds, as well as the Fort", envisaging a thorn thicket, mimicking the African cattle kraal, surrounding the Dutch 'settlement'.³⁴ In general, however, Van Riebeeck affirms Janz and Proot's proposal, offering additional supporting detail concerning the potential of the Cape and the profit to the Company. With respect to cattle, Van Riebeeck concurs, arguing that it is to be hoped, "if we can get into familiar correspondence with the natives, that in time we may buy of them, cattle, sheep, and other live stock, in abundance,

30 Cited in Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 20–21.

31 Moodie, *The Record*, 5.

32 Moodie, *The Record*, 5.

33 Moodie, *The Record*, 5.

34 Moodie, *The Record*, 5.

and cheaper than we could breed them, beside keeping some, to try whether milk might not be had from them”.³⁵

Lastly, as with Janz and Proot’s proposal document, Van Riebeeck turns to religion. Prefacing his comments as they did with a reference to language and education, he writes:

With regard to what L. Janz writes of the natives or their children learning our language, is deserving of notice, and no less a good thing, and consequently the propagation of our Reformed Christian Religion, which he seems to hope, is still better—wherein a good teacher would do the best service, if your Honours were pleased to consent to an expense, which is calculated also to tend to the better edification of your servants to be stationed there.³⁶

The order of priorities is the same. Indeed, even the value of a good teacher has to be counted as an expense and considered within the larger ledger of profit and loss. The ledger ‘book’ is more important, as we will see, than ‘the Book’. The Dutch East India Company will send a ‘sieketrooster’, a “goedkoper” (cheaper) teacher of sorts,³⁷ with the expedition that is sent to establish a refreshment station at the Cape. Among this person’s many tasks, besides comforting the sick and educating the young, will be the public reading of the Bible.

On the 25th March 1651 the “Assembly of the Seventeen” issued “Instructions” to the commanders of the three ships that would embark on the task of establishing a refreshment station at the Cape, which they represent as follows:

Whereas it has been thought fit, by Resolution of the Assembly of Seventeen, representing the said &c. Company, that—in order to provide that the passing and re-passing East India ships, to and from Batavia respectively, may, without accident, touch at the said Cape or Bay, and also upon arriving there, may find the means of procuring herbs, flesh, water, and other needful refreshments—and by this means restore the health of their sick—it is necessary that a general rendezvous be formed near the shore of the said Cape.³⁸

35 Moodie, *The Record*, 6.

36 Moodie, *The Record*, 7.

37 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika, 1652–1866* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1977), 28.

38 Moodie, *The Record*, 7.

The “Instructions” focus mainly on defence, both “against attacks of the inhabitants—being a rude (*rouwe*) people” and being “surprised” by the ships of other imperial nations.³⁹ The protection of the garden and cattle the Company at the Cape hopes to procure receive particular attention:

So soon as you, and the people who have landed with you, are in such a state of defence, that you cannot be surprised by any one, you will proceed to select a proper place to be appropriated as Gardens, taking for this purpose all the best and richest ground, where whatever is sown or planted can thrive well, which Gardens (according to circumstances and situation) ought to be fenced round, upon which we can give no precise order.

You will also make inspection near the Fort for the land best suited for depasturing and breeding cattle, for which purpose a good correspondence and intelligence with the natives will be very necessary, in order to reconcile them in time to our customs, and to attach them to you, which must be effected with discretion, above all, taking care that you do not injure them in person, or in the cattle which they keep or bring to you, by which they may be rendered averse from our people, as has appeared in various instances.

And as the cattle may not at first remain in the fields at night, without great danger of being taken away, you will have them early in the evening driven into the Fort, and in the morning driven again into the fields, for which purpose proper stalls must also be made in the Fort—until in time the natives may be trusted; unless you can adopt other means of keeping the cattle in perfect security without the Fort; which is left to your care and vigilance.⁴⁰

These concerns are reiterated four months later, when the ships arrive at their destination. Two days after their arrival at the Cape, while they were anchored off-shore, Van Riebeeck “summoned” the “Broad Council” (which became the “Council of Policy” when constituted on land) to its first meeting. The Council at this early stage was constituted by the captains of each of the three ships,

39 Moodie, *The Record*, 7–8. On 12 December 1651 more explicit instructions are given concerning which of the other imperial nations the Dutch are in alliance with (at this time); see Moodie, *The Record*, 9.

40 Moodie, *The Record*, 8.

with Van Riebeeck, the Commander, as president.⁴¹ The Journal entry indicates that the primary order of business was “to consult . . . about the work of fortification etc.,” but indicates that “[f]urther instructions with regard to one or two other matters were also drawn up”.⁴² These further instructions were given force in the first “Proclamation” to be issued on the 9th April 1652, and included instructions to the Dutch soldiers and artisans, before they even set foot on African soil, about how to conduct themselves among the local Africans:

And as such new undertakings should be conducted with great caution, particularly as regards the wild people of that country, (they being very impudent), and especially great care be taken that we be in every respect on our guard and in a posture of defence, also, that no cause of offence may be given by us or our men to that people, but on the contrary, that all kindness and friendship be shown to them, in order that by our amicable conduct they may become inclined to an intercourse with us, so that by this means we may have the greater supply of all kinds of cattle, and suffer the less molestation from them in the plantations &c. which we are there to cultivate and to rear for the supply of the Company’s passing and re-passing ships, the chief object, in the first instance, or our Honorable masters—and what further may in time be sought for the service of the Company. . . .

And as these wild tribes are somewhat bold, thievish, and not at all to be trusted, each shall take good care that this arms and working tools, or whatever he be placed in charge of, be well taken care of, that they may not be stolen from him by the savages, as we by no means nor upon any consideration desire, that they should, on account of such theft, excepting with our previous knowledge and consent, be pursued, beaten, aye, even be looked upon with anger—but each shall have his stolen arms or tools charged against his wages, as a penalty, and for his carelessness receive 50 lashes at the whipping post, and forfeit his rations of wine for 8 days, or such other severer punishment as the exigency of the case may demand.

And accordingly, whoever ill-uses, beats or pushes any of the natives, be he in the right or in the wrong, shall in their presence be punished with 50 lashes, that they may thus see that such is against our will, and that we

41 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 23.

42 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 26, see also notes 1 and 3.

are disposed to correspond with them in all kindness and friendship, in accordance with the orders and objects of our employers. . . .

To this end all persons whomsoever are seriously exhorted and ordered, to show them every friendship and kindness, that they may in time, through our courteous behaviour, become the sooner accustomed and attached to us, so that we may attain the object of our employers. . . .⁴³

The focus here is entirely on constructing what is imagined to be the most appropriate conditions for trade, though the threat of force and the prospect of 'taking' hover in the background, implied in the original "Instructions" of the Assembly of the Seventeen. Religion is not entirely neglected, however. In the prayer with which Van Riebeeck opened the first meeting of the Council there is reference to the religious dimension of their presence at the Cape:

Since Thou hast called us to conduct the affairs of the East India Company here at the Cape of Good Hope, and we are now assembled that we may arrive at such decisions as shall be of most service to the Company, and shall conduce to the maintenance of justice, and the propagation and extension (if that be possible) of Thy true Reformed Christian Religion among these wild and brutal men, to the praise and glory of Thy name, we pray Thee, O most merciful Father, that Thou wouldest so enlighten our hearts with Thy fatherly wisdom, that all wrong passions, all misconceptions and all similar defects, may be warded from us, and that we may neither purpose nor decide ought but that which shall tend to magnify Thy most holy Name.⁴⁴

Here too the priority is trade. Trade is the godly task, and so God's guidance is required to enable Van Riebeeck and his company to conduct themselves among the local Africans in such a way that would facilitate trade. The propagation and extension of the Reformed Christian Religion is a hoped for but not a necessary component of the primary project.

Yet a form of religion is an important part of the fabric of these traders' lives, though their public form of religion makes little or no reference to the Bible at all. The Bible is present on their ships but has a very conscribed role.

43 Moodie, *The Record*, 10–11. These instructions are reiterated when a new clan arrives in the area, in a "Proclamation" on the 14th of October 1652; Moodie, *The Record*, 16.

44 Cited in Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 23.

The Folk Bible: Religion at Sea

On Sunday 24th December 1651, the newly appointed Commander to the Cape, Jan Van Riebeeck, set sail from Texel, in the Netherlands. The first entry in the Journal is from the 14th December 1651. Religion is present from the beginning; ordinary popular-public religion.

From the very moment the ships weigh anchor God is invoked. Van Riebeeck came on board the lead ship, the *Drommedaris*, on the 16th December, having received his orders from a full meeting of the “Lords Directors” of the Company.⁴⁵ The first stage of the journey was a short one, from the Balgh (a harbour area between the island of Wieringen and the mainland of north Holland), to Texel, the departure point for the voyage. As the Journal records, on the 20th December, “At about noon, the pilots being on board, we set sail from the *Balgh* before a southerly wind for Texel, where, praise God, we arrived in the evening together with the *Reijger* and came safely to anchor in 9 fathoms”.⁴⁶ God is praised because, the record reflects, life at sea was dangerous. God it seems is an active participant in the project, particularly when it comes to protection. God is in control of the weather, and the weather is a primary ‘character’ in the plot of this project.

The perceived vulnerability of Van Riebeeck and his crew is evident even in this preparatory voyage. Of the five ships that were originally part of Van Riebeeck’s fleet, only three, the *Drommedaris*, *Reijger*, and *Hoope* made it from the Balgh to Texel in time for the ordered departure date. The other two ships, the *Walvis* and *Oliphant*, were delayed by the weather for ten days, and arrived in the Cape about a month after Van Riebeeck.⁴⁷ Weather was the primary protagonist, under God. And so God is praised even for this short, safe, journey.

God is praised again, on the day of departure, as all three ships make it safely out to the open sea, and then again on the 26th December as “a gentle breeze from N.N.W.” enables them, “praise God, to pass the Heads during the dog-watch” (from midnight to 4am, in the dark).⁴⁸ The 25th December is recorded as “Christmas Day”, but nothing more religious is said about this day. Religion is reserved, predominantly, for the recognition of God’s control of the weather.

But another, related, element emerges in the Journal entries of the 29th December to the 3rd January 1652. The wind direction on the 29th December forces the ships to sail “obliquely towards the English coast”, and despite the

45 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 1.

46 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 3.

47 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 3, see also note 3.

48 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 4.

best efforts of the crew, for the *Drommedaris* proves to be a “cranky” ship, it looks as if they will have “to seek a harbour on the coast of England and to obtain there as much stone for ballast as we might deem necessary for properly steadying the ship”.⁴⁹ This is no easy decision, for the English are the prime imperial and commercial competition in this period. Not only will this decision place them within the grasp of their trade rivals, but it will also delay their own trade project. Van Riebeeck therefore summons the officers of the other two ships, the *Reijger* and the *Hoope*, and it is formally recorded in the Journal that they “resolved unambiguously, though reluctantly yet of necessity” to take this course of action. But in the evening of the 30th December, having altered course towards the coast of England, the wind shifts and so they are forced to tack away from the English coast. Struggling to control the cranky *Dommedaris*, the Journal reflects the tension of this moment, unable to make steady progress and unable to make port. In the midst of this uncertainty God is again invoked. They sail on “in the hope that the Almighty would let us keep this favourable wind until we were beyond the peril of enemies, when we could bring some canon below for steadying the ship”.⁵⁰ On the 31st, but recorded as “*Sunday ultimo*”, a heavy swell threatens to capsize the *Dommedaris*, but despite their fears, “the Almighty has preserved us on this occasion”.⁵¹ God is in control, but God’s purposes are not clear. Though it is hoped that God is aligned with their (trade) purposes.

As the *Drommedaris* lumbers on, the Journal records the frustration and anger of the Commander. On the 3rd January 1652 the entry includes this reflection:

The other ships were nearly all the time carry full topsails, and to the great retardation of the voyage had to wait for us. It is most deplorable that in the Fatherland the servants or dockhands of the Hon. Company pay so little attention to the clear instructions issued by the Hon. Directors regarding the loading and stowing of the ships. As a result of this the Company’s property as well as so many souls are exposed to danger; for hardly had a substantial wind filled the sails than the ship would heel over so much to the one side as if she wanted to capsize. We thus sailed in great anxiety, and if Almighty God had not favoured us with a fair wind for sailing down the Channel, we should of necessity have had to seek a

49 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 7–8.

50 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 8.

51 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 8.

harbour in England for taking in ballast, to the great retardation of our voyage and the disservice of the Company.⁵²

As a record in the public realm this entry is instructive. The Company is the ultimate authority and their directives and purposes are sacrosanct. God it is hoped (and sometimes assumed) is an alliance partner. The latter is evident in the entry of the 5th January, as the *Drommedaris* lurches past the coast of Spain, another potential rival. On this occasion “the Lord God made the rough weather subside and gave us a favourable W.N.W. wind”.⁵³

On the 7th January the Journal records the first death at sea. Tijmon Janssen of Amsterdam, a carpenter, “died of dropsy”. He is “lowered overboard according to the practice at sea; other than this, praise God, we know of no particular sickness among the men”.⁵⁴ God is in control of the elements (the weather) and of their health. It is also important to note that there is no overt reference to the use of religion during the burial at sea. Prayers must have been said and the Bible may have been read, but there is no reference in the Journal to this self-evident rhythm of their religion. Every “Sunday” is recorded as such in the Journal, but no mention is made of the religious practices that probably took place on this day. The Journal reveals these other dimensions of religious life more slowly.

Sickness, like weather, is an enduring feature their world. The health of the men on board the ships is a constant concern. Following this first death, the officers of *Reijger* and the *Hoope* are summoned to the *Drommedaris* on the 20th January “to enquire after the health of their men”. The occasion for this consultation is the proximity of the Cape Verde Islands, where there is an opportunity “to call at one of them for refreshments” and to allow the sick to recuperate. However, “we ascertained that none of the ships, praise God, had any sick men, at any rate nothing serious enough to retard our voyage by calling at the islands”. To have stopped would have been permissible, but to continue without delay is the higher purpose. “It was unanimously agreed”, the Journal entry continues, “to pass them by and with all possible diligence to pursue our voyage in order to attain Cabo de boa Esperance [the Cape] in good time, to which end may the Almighty grant us His holy guidance. Amen”.⁵⁵ This decision is formally arrived at and formally recorded, at a meeting of the Broad

52 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 9.

53 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 9.

54 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 10.

55 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 12.

Council,⁵⁶ the highest authority of this fleet. They hope God is watching their progress; they know the Company is.

Prayers of protection are interspersed through the Journal, protection from weather, from sickness, and from their rivals. As they move nine of their canon below, on the 20th February, to steady the *Drommedaris*, they are fearful of leaving themselves exposed to piracy. So they remove only the minimum number to serve as ballast, recording carefully their defensive diligence. Their fear of an attack at sea (and later on land) from either the English or the Portuguese is palpable, so they “deem it prudent to be on our guard in every respect”. “We hope in the meantime”, the entry records, “that the Almighty will protect us from misfortune. Amen.”⁵⁷

Sickness is more difficult to defend against, and on the 12th March they bury at sea the chief surgeon’s second youngest child, who died from scurvy. This disease was greatly feared on long voyages, precipitated as it was by the scarcity of fresh food. Indeed, the provision of fresh food to the ships of the Company was the primary reason for establishing a refreshment station at the Cape. Having decided not to delay the fleet from its primary objective by stopping over at the Cape Verde Islands, the officers of the fleet must take responsibility for this death, which they do by recording in the Journal the following entry: “Praise God, to date no other has been smitten with this disease”.⁵⁸ The loss is acceptable, for as we have already read in the entry of the 3rd January, property is held in higher regard than people. One of the fundamental functions of the Journal was to provide a balance sheet of profit and loss for the Company. Van Riebeeck’s Journal does precisely this, fulfilling the role of ledger. Religion in general and the Bible in particular, we will see, play their role too in serving the primary purpose of profitable trade.

But for now, in the early entries in Van Riebeeck’s Journal, the Bible remains in the background. Ordinary religion is ever present, but only in these fragments. “*Easter Day*”, the 31st March passes without any additional comment. But a few days later, on the 4th April, there is a more fulsome entry, noting a course change “in the evening after prayers”.⁵⁹ So clearly there is a regular daily rhythm of religious practice on board ship. However, the focus of the Journal entries is the preparations for the fleet’s arrival at the Cape. Van Riebeeck

56 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 12, note 2.

57 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 15. In citing from the Journal and other primary sources I have chosen to foreground the reality of representation, shifting ‘voice’ within a sentence.

58 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 16.

59 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 18, 19.

instructs the fleet to stay together so that they will arrive at the Cape together, for they are apprehensive about what they may find when they arrive. Their fear is that they may find rival ships “lying at anchor in the roadstead in the Table Bay”.⁶⁰

When “the land of Cabo de boa Esperance” is sighted, in the afternoon of the 5th April, God is praised, and God is praised again on the 6th April when a scouting party returns with the news that there are no other ships.⁶¹ As the three ships turn “towards the land” their primary worry is not the local Africans they will meet in the next few days but their European rivals. Having found Table Bay empty of ships, they give thanks to God, and prepare themselves for their part in the long chain of trade between “the Fatherland” and “India”. These forms of ‘folk’ religion persist on land, for it is the dominant form of religion among this Dutch company.

The Constrained Bible: Bartering Cattle

With Table Bay empty of rival ships, the attention of Van Riebeeck and his company turns to the un-empty land. They know the land is not empty (as the map below acknowledges); indeed, the presence of local peoples is part of the importance of this site. Local people, it is envisaged, will become a key part of the chain of trade, if only they will part with their cattle. The experience of the shipwrecked crew of the *Haerlem* is invoked in the Journal entry of the 7th April 1652, alongside the actual presence of “2 savages”:

This evening we went ashore together provisionally to consider more or less where the fort should be built. Also had 2 savages on board this evening, one of whom could speak a little English. We generously filled their bellies with food and drink. As far as we could gather no cattle could be obtained from them for—as they gave us to understand by means of broken English and signs—they were only fishermen and the cattle were always supplied by those from Saldania. This we had also learned from a few survivors of the ship *Haerlem*.⁶²

It should be noted that the most local of the Africans, those who foraged for their livelihoods along the coastal extremity and who were therefore thoroughly

60 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 20.

61 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 19, 20.

62 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 25.



FIGURE 1 "A new & accurate map of the Southern parts of Africa", 1747. Line scale given in English and French Leagues, first appeared in 1747 and reissued in 1752 and 1766. It also appeared (uncoloured) in E. Bowen: A complete atlas [...] of the known world; also in his *Systemo geographiae*. Map from Hugh Solomon Collection, *Africana*. Copyright Stellenbosch University.

familiar with the Europeans of various empires who passed by on an irregular basis, had already, at this early stage of this visit (for that is all it would have appeared to be from the perspective of these locals), made their way on board Van Riebeeck's ship. Though written about in a condescending manner, these two Africans were already determining the parameters of trade.

But the first order of business for the Dutch landing party in the early hours of the 7th April 1652 is not to establish trading relationships with the local people. Their presence is acknowledged in that the shallop that sets out for shore includes six armed soldiers, together with the skipper, and the oarsmen. Their primary task is "to see whether any letters had been buried here by ships which had called", and the secondary task is "to procure some greens for

refreshments, because we have now been at sea for over three and half months without having called at any place for refreshment, and as a result of this the health of the men has been rather undermined”.⁶³ Information and refreshments are essential elements of the infrastructure of the Company’s trade.

The shallop returns with “a small box of letters”, left there on the 25th February, and fresh fish.⁶⁴ The practice of leaving letters, under so-called “Post Office Stones”, was a long established tradition predating this first European ‘settlement’ at the Cape. The letter box contained three letters, two addressed to the “Governor-General and Councillors of India”, the Company’s supreme authority in the East, and one addressed to the captains of the “return fleet”, making their way back to “the beloved Fatherland”. The letters were written by the Commander of the return fleet, Jan Van Teijlingen, who was fulfilling his task of relaying information in both directions. The Journal entry for this date highlights two items of information of particular importance. First, it is noted that Van Teijlingen “procured only one head of cattle and one sheep . . . after lying here 11 days”.⁶⁵ The second piece of information concerns contact with the local people. That letters could be left under stones for months at a time is testimony to local participation, even local collaboration. But the content of the letters makes this collaboration clear, for Van Teijlingen leaves the horses he has brought for the Cape “in the hands of the Hottentot who speaks English”.⁶⁶ What interests the Journal is the role the locals have come to play in the trade in information. “From this”, the entry continues, “we gather that they must have conferred with this native and therefore may have learnt something from him and written about it to the Hon. Governor-General and Councillors of India”. And because this information “may perchance be useful information for us here in the service of the Hon. Company”, they “therefore decided to open that letter which was not particularly and privately addressed”. Having carefully documented this decision and the reasons for taking them, they copy and record the letters in full in the Journal.

As the Journal has already noted, key to the information Van Teijlingen includes in his letter to the Governor-General and Councillors of India is the following: “Only one head of cattle and one sheep were brought to us by the savages, nor do we see any likelihood—in view of the unwillingness of these unreasonable persons—of obtaining any more cattle or other refreshment, although cattle in abundance have been seen by seamen not far from the

63 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 20–21.

64 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 21.

65 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 21.

66 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 21.

shore”.⁶⁷ This information is important enough for him to repeat it in his letter to the captains of the return fleet who have not arrived yet at the Cape. In this letter he writes: “We have obtained here for refreshment only one head of cattle and one sheep, although inland the seamen have seen cattle in abundance; the unreasonable savages, however, would not bring us any more than those mentioned. God grant that you may fare better”.⁶⁸

But God did not so grant, and neither these other captains nor Van Riebeeck would fare much better. Though Jan Van Riebeeck would prove himself more pragmatic, his experience would soon match that of Van Teijlingen. There were “cattle in abundance”, but few available for trade. And trade was what the Company was about. Trade was also what Van Riebeeck and his own particular company was about. Van Riebeeck was born into a respectable middle-class family in a period when Europe was ruled as much by powerful private traders as it was by traditional ‘national’ political formations. There was considerable colonial and commercial competition between the imperial powers, including England, Holland (specifically the United Dutch Provinces), Spain, and France, as they competed for control and profit in a geographically and geologically expanding world. Van Riebeeck was also born (1618/19) into a period in which Calvinism was finding its forms after the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–1619) and in which the Dutch East India Company was in its prime.⁶⁹ Trade and religion, in that order, would shape Van Riebeeck’s life.

Having completed an apprenticeship in medicine, Van Riebeeck entered the service of the Dutch East India Company in April 1639, as a junior surgeon. But shortly after arriving in Batavia, the headquarters of the Company in the East, from which it “ruled over its valuable and extensive possessions”,⁷⁰ he “abandoned the medical profession for the sake of commerce and administration”.⁷¹ He gradually worked his way up the hierarchy of the Company, serving in a variety of positions in a variety of locations in the East. Like many others in the employ of the Company, Van Riebeeck traded both on behalf of the Company and his own behalf. This practice was common in a Company that squeezed its employees to the maximum, extracting as much work as they could from them at a minimum wage. Profit was the one true god. If one was to assemble a personal fortune one had to do so ‘privately’. The Company tended to look the other way, provided this private trade was not blatant. But when it became

67 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 22.

68 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 24–25.

69 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, xvii–xviii.

70 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, xix.

71 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, xx.

apparent, the combination of Calvinism and Company policy resulted in sanction. Van Riebeeck was indicted for private trade and sent home to stand trial in 1648.⁷²

In March of that year Van Riebeeck encountered the Cape on his way home, but did not stay. The Lords Seventeen, the policy directors of the Company, meeting in Amsterdam had no mercy on Van Riebeeck and he was discharged. But some years later, having continued in forms of commercial work, Van Riebeeck was offered a chance to comment on the proposal to establish a refreshment station for the Company at the Cape. His memorandum on the matter, as we have noted, had an impact, for Van Riebeeck was appointed as commander of the envisioned refreshment station at the Cape. And when the opportunity presented itself to appropriate land for himself, he would do so, participating privately in the Company's colonisation of indigenous African land.

Providing "refreshment" for the ships that plied the route between the Netherlands and Batavia (in Java; now Jakarta, Indonesia) was a substantial undertaking, and Van Riebeeck set about it with vigour. As early as the entry for the 7th April 1652, two days after the ships sighted the Cape and a day after the first landing party went ashore to return with the letters, Van Riebeeck begins the work of establishing the refreshment station.

Stung perhaps by the reference in Van Teijlingen's letter to the Governor-General and Councillors of India to the effect that upon his arrival at the Cape, for which "the merciful God be sincerely thanked", "we found no ship nor pinnace from the Fatherland, much less a small fort on land",⁷³ Van Riebeeck devotes large parts of his first four shore visits to scouting for a suitable site for the fort (on the 7th), selecting and surveying the site (8th), marking out the dimensions of the fort (9th), and setting a hundred of the hundred and eighty one available men to work on the site (10th).⁷⁴ The fort is first and foremost focussed on the threat from the sea, from rival European forces, especially the Portugese.⁷⁵ However, as Van Riebeeck and his company come to understand the local African agenda more fully, they take more precautions on the landward side.⁷⁶

With work on the fort having begun, Van Riebeeck then turns his attention to forming a trade alliance with the local African peoples. Having initially

72 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, xx–xxiv.

73 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 22.

74 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 25–30.

75 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 32.

76 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 76.

adopted the language of Van Teijlingen concerning the local people, referring to them as “savages”, the company at the Cape quickly adapts to a more respectful set of epithets, recognising the agency and power of the local peoples, particularly with respect to their most sought after commodity, cattle. It will take more than filling their bellies to form a sustained and profitable trade alliance. And it will take considerable time for the Dutch traders even to begin to understand the reasons for the unreasonableness of the local peoples with respect to trading their cattle.

Van Riebeeck and his company start to pay attention to what the local people say; indeed, they become obsessive about using almost every opportunity to probe the local people concerning their perspectives on a host of matters. On this very first day, the 7th of April 1652, they glean three very important pieces of information. First, that the particular local people who occupy that part of the Cape are “fishermen”, and do not trade in cattle. Second, that there are other people who do trade in cattle, or so this local people claim. And third, that the African peoples in the area are plural; they are not all the same.

This kind of local information is key to the larger project, and the Journal carefully gathers and sifts the information it gleans, both from the locals and from European sources, such as the corroborating information from the survivors of the *Haerlem*.

The first day on the land has therefore been remarkably instructive, a reminder of the care we must exercise in using terms like ‘colonialism’. Local African peoples interject and interpolate themselves into the entries of this European record. They are present and they do speak, even on this, the first day. Indeed, they insert themselves immediately into the lives and Journal of these traders. The phrase “had 2 savages on board this evening” obscures the agency of the local people. As will become clear in Journal entry after Journal entry, the local peoples are determined to trade with the Dutch (until it becomes apparent they are no longer passing traders but land-taking settlers). Some already know a few words of the Dutch language, having met some of their kind before, and most of them have had previous opportunities to engage in trade with passing ships (of various European identities and empires). No sooner has the Dutch fleet openly entered the Table Bay than the local people invite themselves on to the *Drommedaris*. As the phrase “had 2 savages on board this evening” indicates, the Dutch are reluctant to acknowledge who is in control of this encounter.

In the midst of work beginning on the fort, on the 10th April, about noon, “a small band of 9 or 10 savages from Saldania arrived”. The Journal entry goes on then to record in some detail the relationship between the two African peoples. The most local African group, previously described as “fisherman”

and now referred to by the proper noun “Strandlopers” (beach walkers),⁷⁷ take what appears to the Journal to be a defensive stance over-against those from Saldania. The Journal goes on to represent the Company’s men, “with our corporal and some armed soldiers”, as “arranging a truce between them”.⁷⁸ As we will soon see, the Company has little understanding of the complex relationships between the various local peoples; and, the local “Strandlopers” will not allow themselves to be so easily displaced as the intermediaries between the Dutch and the African peoples to the interior of the Cape. But for now, on this occasion, the Company representatives are able to deal directly with those from Saldania. And they are able to hear what they have hoped to hear: “Those from Saldania, by means of signs and the use of broken English, as well as some Dutch words evidently learnt—and remembered—from the shipwrecked crew of the Haerlem, gave us to understand that for copper and tobacco they would bring cattle and sheep within a few days”. As they had done with the “Strandlopers” on the first day, “By good and liberal treatment we urged them to do so”.⁷⁹

The group from Saldania is encountered later in the day, as they make their way back to their people, by a small party from the ships who had gone fishing. The tone of the entry shifts quite markedly in this one paragraph. Though it begins by identifying these people as “the 9 Saldania savages”, the perspective is different from any earlier entry. There seems to be surprise, “almost a wonder”, that this group of Africans “adopted such an amicable and pleasant attitude”, and that they responded “as if with great joy” on learning that one of the party was the captain of one of the ships. This friendly reception is followed by a reiteration, through signs, “that if we had copper and tobacco they would bring us enough cattle”. The generosity of this African group results in a comparatively favourable description of them in the record: “They were very fine and nimble men of particularly good stature, clad in passably prepared oxhides, which they carried smartly over the arm with an air and gait as dashing as any dandy’s in the Fatherland, carrying his cloak over his shoulder or

77 This chapter uses the designations for the indigenous peoples as recorded in the Journal when citing from the Journal; see also Schapera, *The Early Cape Hottentots, Described in the Writings of Olfert Dapper (1668), Willem Ten Rhyne (1686), and Johannes Gulielmus De Grevenbroek (1695)* (trans. Schapera and Farrington; Cape Town: The Van Riebeeck Society, 1933); Elphick, *Kraal and Castle: Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Those local to the Cape are referred to variously as Khoisan or Khoikhoi by more recent authors; see Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa*, Johnson, *Imagining the Cape Colony*.

78 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 30.

79 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 30.

arm". However, the paragraph concludes, "They went with their private parts exposed . . . having only a small skin over them".⁸⁰ Just as the Africans are not all the same, so too neither are the Dutch. Among the Company's men and women different attitudes will be adopted towards the Africans, particularly with respect to trade.

Towards the end of the first week at the Cape, two notable events are recorded. On the 13th April the first trade transaction takes place: "To-day bartered 3 small plates of copper and 3 pieces of ½ fathom copper wire for a cow and young calf, of which each ship received its proper share".⁸¹ On the following day, a Sunday, it is recorded in passing that there has been "a Sunday service".⁸² The first bartering of copper for cattle is recorded without much fanfare; this is presumed to be the beginning of a burgeoning trade. The first Sunday service is mentioned in passing; the religion of the Company is routine.⁸³ Both trade and religion will become more complex. But it is important to note how carefully the trade is documented. The Company's presence at the Cape is all about profit and loss, and the Journal holds each and every Company employee accountable in its ledger of life at the Cape. It is also important to note that the bartered cattle are immediately consumed. The outpost at the Cape is about supplying a steady supply of fresh food and water to the ships that ply this route. Furthermore, there is no intention, yet, to acquire land in order to sustain a herd in order to supply the Company's ships; this is the role of the local Africans, to use their land to sustain their cattle to supply a steady resource, as part of a trade agreement, to the Company.

On the 15th April there is another first. The first ship to be refreshed by Van Riebeeck and his company "arrived here safely at anchor, praise God",⁸⁴ on its way from Batavia. The sharing of information is the focus of the Journal entries. Sensitive information is communicated directly to the captain of the ship "in order that he and those with him could act accordingly to the advantage of the Company".⁸⁵ The information they share orally is information they have brought with them from "our Lords Directors", prohibiting war "against any European nation except Portugal". Among the information Van Riebeeck sends via sealed letter with this ship is a detailed report on "the progress of our

80 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 30.

81 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 31.

82 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 31.

83 The Journal entries for Sundays sometimes mention the Sunday service and sometimes not. Compare Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 33, 35.

84 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 31.

85 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 32.

work”, especially regarding the work on the fort.⁸⁶ So European geo-politics dominate discussions at the Cape, for now.

During the next week, however, the focus shifts, as Van Riebeeck and his company begin to explore the surrounding area. There “we found everywhere the finest clay ground and other beautiful, broad, fertile soil—as fine as one could find anywhere in the world”. They are both impressed and frustrated, for they lament that “[w]ith the small number of men we have, however, not one hundredth part of it could be ploughed or cultivated”. For the purpose of refreshing the ships that ply this trade route the land must be cultivated, and to this end Van Riebeeck reckons that it would “therefore be suitable if some industrious Chinese were to come here for that purpose”.⁸⁷ Later in the week, when again “we found between the mountain and the downs the most beautiful land for sowing and for grazing cattle that one could desire”, his thoughts turn to cultivation: “if only there were enough men for the purpose”. Again, the preferred candidates for this task are “married Chinese”,⁸⁸ but the options now broaden, including “other free *Mardijckers*” (liberated slaves from Batavia), and lastly “even also *Hollanders*, who could be allowed on certain conditions to occupy some plots of land”.⁸⁹ This is the first mention of ‘settlement’. But before we rush to proclaim ‘colonialism’, we must pause and allow the record to reveal the much more complex set of forces that do bring about a form of settlement. We must remember too that the Africans at the Cape remain firmly in control of their land and their cattle.

Before we delve more deeply into the ‘true’ religion of profit, we must note a peculiar trait of the early religious routine of these visiting traders. On Sunday the 28th April we glean a little more about their religious practice. The Journal notes in passing that further exploration of the environs took place “[o]n completion of the Sunday service held by the sick-comforter”,⁹⁰ whom we later learn is one Willem Barentssen Wijlant.⁹¹ He is the first in a series of ‘sick-comforters’ to be stationed at the Cape, and one of four who serve there before a proper minister of religion is appointed to the, by then, thirteen years later (1665), emerging ‘colony’. The significance of the sick-comforter is that they are the keepers of the Company’s Bible.

86 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 33.

87 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 33.

88 See also Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 36.

89 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 35.

90 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 35.

91 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 124, in an entry of the 6th January 1653.

The Prescribed Bible: The Role of the Sick-comforter

The *sieketrooster* (sick-comforter) is not a *predikant*, a minister, but does similar kinds of work, though much more carefully circumscribed. His task was, notwithstanding certain restrictions, to be responsible for the spiritual care (*geestelike bearbeiding*) of the local congregation (*van die plaaslike bevolking*), specifically the Dutch contingent at the Cape, for under this form of Protestantism each and every Dutch person was considered part of a local congregation.⁹² While the *sieketrooster* was also responsible for the proclamation of the Word to the wider community of the Cape,⁹³ this was an implicit part of his work, for the *sieketrooster* was employed by the Dutch East India Company, not the church. There were no legal grounds within the Charter (1602) to force the Dutch East India Company to undertake the missiological aspect of the Christian Reformed Religion.⁹⁴ However, article 35 of the Charter that constituted the Dutch East India Company considered the Company to be the representative of the state (*owerheid*), and because the state assumed and accepted the dual task of the observance and expansion of the Reformed Christian Religion, so too it was assumed and accepted that the Dutch East India Company, as the representative of the state, would do the same.⁹⁵ Indeed, as early as 27 February 1603 the Lord's Seventeen, the directors of the Dutch East India Company, decided at their own cost to appoint people who would be competent "*omme Godts woort voor te dragen ende t volck jegens alle superstitie ende verleydinge der Mooren ende Atheïsten uyt de H. Schrifture te vermanen*" (to recite Gods Word and to admonish the people against all superstition and temptations of the Moors and Atheists with the Holy Scripture).⁹⁶

The Dutch East India Company took responsibility, therefore, for the general task of spreading the name of Christ, which included bringing salvation to non-Christians and ensuring that the Dutch East India Company and its employees

92 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 13.

93 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 19. From this point onwards I use the Dutch term but without italics, signalling the 'normal' difference of this position.

94 Schutter, "Between Amsterdam and Batavia: Cape Society and the Calvinist Church under the Dutch East India Company," *Kronos: southern african histories* 25 (1998/1999); Raath, "Covenant and the Christian Community: Bullinger and the Relationship between Church and Magistracy in Early Cape Settlement (1652–1708)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 4 (2002).

95 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 20.

96 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 21. My thanks to Hanna Wapenaar and Martha Weich for assistance with the translations from the old Dutch.

behaved in a reputable manner as behoved the honour of their nation.⁹⁷ But, whereas the Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church) employed the *predikanten* (ministers), it was the Dutch East India Company who employed the sieketroosters (sick-comforters).⁹⁸ In the religious hierarchy of the Company at the Cape, the *predikant* ruled on matters of religion, including what could and could not be done with the Bible.

The vocation of the sieketrooster was considered a form of diaconial service. In its earliest form the work of the sieketrooster was restricted to the physical care of the vulnerable, particularly the sick, orphans, and the elderly. But gradually a 'spiritual' role was permitted, though there were concerns, from both civil and church authorities, about the control and training of this emerging 'ministry'.⁹⁹ Alongside the core ministry of exercising mercy and charity ("*diens van barmhartigheid*"),¹⁰⁰ the second element that shaped what was to become the work of the sieketrooster was the public reading of the Bible before the formal start of church services ("*voorlesing uit die Skrif voor die aanvang van die diens*"), Sunday after Sunday, reading chapter after chapter from Genesis to Revelation (though later this practice was replaced by a schedule of readings, a form of lectionary, related to the church-year).¹⁰¹ A third element that shaped the vocation of the sieketrooster was the work of teaching the young, particular catechumens.¹⁰² And a fourth element was the need to offer such forms of service to the expanding Dutch empire on both sea and (foreign) land.¹⁰³

Ships and their ports of call therefore became key sites in the formation of the vocation of the sieketrooster. A logical development of the "*Gereformeerde Skrifbeskouing*" (Reformed scriptural worldview) was that 'the Word' should not only be proclaimed on land, but also at sea.¹⁰⁴ So the sieketrooster became a fixture of the empire's "largest ships and most important possessions".¹⁰⁵ It was on ships and at places like the Cape that the four elements indicated above—"krankebesoeker, voorleser, katkiseermeester, en voorganger op die skepe" (sick visitor, reader of the Bible, teacher of catechism, and precursor-minister on

97 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 21.

98 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 21.

99 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 22–23.

100 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 22.

101 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 23–24. The reading of church announcements and even the leading of singing also became components of the sieketroosters' task and vocation.

102 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 24, 148–149.

103 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 25.

104 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 25.

105 Cited in Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 22, and see also 27.

the ships)—came together in a single vocation, that of the sieketrooster. To these four Holland-based historical lines of development of the vocation of the sieketrooster was added a fifth, for on board ship and on foreign lands (*buitenlandse*) the sieketrooster also fulfilled the task of missionary, though they were not sent out as such.¹⁰⁶

The emergence of “*sieketroosterskap*” (the particular ‘career’ or vocation of the sick-comforter) was accidental, contingent on the limited numbers of *predikante* and the range of needs associated with the ministry of a state-based church. What is clear, however, is that throughout its development, *sieketroosterskap* was deeply contested by both civil authorities and church authorities, for the fear was that a form of ministry was emerging for which there was not yet appropriate training and control. Because of these concerns, the work of the sieketrooster at sea and on foreign lands was carefully constrained as far as was formally possible.

From the perspective of the Reformed Church, the following is a summary of the task of the sieketrooster, set out in an “*Instructiebrief*” (Instruction) in 1636.¹⁰⁷ The starting point is the recognition that the ships of the Dutch East India Company should include a sieketrooster in order to maintain an orthodox faith among the Dutch personnel and to proclaim an orthodox understanding of God among the heathen.¹⁰⁸ Given this starting point, the task was fourfold. First, the sieketrooster was responsible for teaching, admonishing, and comforting the sick and infirm from God’s Holy Word, according to their particular circumstances. Second, the sieketrooster was responsible, at established times and on suitable occasions, for the singing of the Psalms, the reading of portions of the Bible, and the preaching of sermons from certain prescribed sources approved by the Reformed Church, as well as the opening and closing of such activities with prayer. Third, the sieketrooster was responsible for gathering the people together in an orderly fashion every morning and every night and leading them in prayer, as well as leading the prayer before and after each meal. Fourth, the sieketrooster was responsible for using the Word of God at every opportunity to instruct the ignorant diligently in the faith, to earnestly exhort sinners to repentance and to cease from sin, to warn the faithful through the presentation of the frightening judgements of God concerning destruction, to oppose through every possible and appropriate opportunity swearing and the taking of God’s name in vain, and any form of immoral language, and to

106 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 26.

107 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 31. See also the summary in Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 24.

108 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 31.

comfort and strengthen those who for whatever reason were lacking in faith or discouraged.¹⁰⁹

However, having outlined the tasks the sieketrooster was responsible for, the “*Instructiebrief*” made it clear to sieketroosters that they should not presume to undertake any other responsibilities outside of these designated responsibilities.¹¹⁰ In addition, given that it was the Lord’s Seventeen who were paying the salaries of the sieketroosters, they fell under the direct control of the Dutch East India Company, who formulated a set of their own “*Instructie*” (Instructions) for both *predikante* and sieketroosters, consisting of fifteen (in the 1617 version) and nineteen (in the 1695 version) articles, outlining the Company’s expectations and constraints.¹¹¹ The focus of these articles of instruction served to locate the sieketrooster (and *predikant*) within the Company’s order of things.

With respect to the Bible, the sieketrooster was responsible for its presence at sea and on (foreign) land, but this responsibility was limited to a careful theological circumscribed rendition of the Bible. Though the Bible was read aloud, regularly and systematically, allowing opportunities for and the possibility of the Bible being ‘re-membered’ and appropriated variously by those who heard it being read (including any listening Africans), the primary task of the sieketrooster was to use the Bible within a prescribed theological frame. This frame was an established and recognised frame among the Dutch ‘congregation’ on board ship and at the Cape. Indeed, it should be remembered that the *Statenbijbel*, the ‘new’ Dutch translation of the Bible was only published in 1637, so that many were not yet familiar with a Bible in a language they could understand, namely their own Dutch language. So the theological deconstruction of orthodoxy the vernacular Bible would enable was still some way off at the time the Dutch established a refreshment station at the Cape.

But there would be others at the Cape, those indigenous to the Cape, some of whom would encounter the sieketrooster’s Bible. What they would make of this carefully circumscribed and constrained Bible is not clear. They had yet to form an interest in the Bible. The interest they shared with the Dutch ‘sojourners’, however, was trade. Among the acceptable activities of the sieketrooster was assisting the ship’s doctor (*skeepsdokter*), not only caring for the sick but also assisting with minor medical procedures. Given that Jan Van Riebeeck had been a ship’s doctor before he became an entrepreneur, and given the status associated with being a sieketrooster, it is not surprising that

109 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 31–32.

110 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 32.

111 Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika*, 32–36.

this first sieketrooster would play a prominent role within the rather circumscribed space allowed the Dutch at the Cape, including transactions concerning cattle.

The Retributive Bible: Towards Seizing African Cattle

Among the many constituent elements of the nascent Company project at the Cape was the quest for a reliable and steady supply of cattle.¹¹² Journal entry after Journal entry records the increasingly desperate attempts to gain access to and possess the indigenous people's many cattle. Just as the Goringhaikonas, those who lived in the coastal strip of the Cape, had promised cattle when "the Saldania's" (Goringhaiquas) arrived, so too when the Goringhaiquas did arrive, on the 10th April 1652, they too promised "enough cattle".¹¹³ This too would become a pattern.¹¹⁴

The Company at the Cape encouraged contact and offered generous hospitality to the indigenous peoples, "to make them all the more accustomed to us and in due time to extract as much profit as practicable for the Hon. Company".¹¹⁵ But it became apparent early on in their stay that acquiring many cattle would be difficult. The absence of cattle, and the milk and fresh meat that they signified for the Company, had a debilitating effect on the minds and bodies of the Company. As sickness spread it seemed to them "as if Almighty God is severely visiting us with this plague";¹¹⁶ and part of the problem, as they acknowledge, was that

since our arrival [and it is now the 10th of June 1652] we have been unable to obtain from these natives more than one cow and a calf—and that at the very beginning. So at present life here is becoming sad and miserable; daily one after another falls ill with this complaint ["red flux"] and many are dying from it. If it does not please the Almighty to deliver us from this

112 Though the desire to control a steady supply of cattle at the Cape would propel the Dutch into seizing and settling on indigenous African land, 'colonialism' was still far off.

113 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 30. These designations for the peoples of the Cape are as given by Thom.

114 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 372.

115 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 38.

116 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 42.

plague, we see little chance of completing our work, as many of our men are dying and the rest are mostly sick in bed.¹¹⁷

For just as the Company is cultivating its relationships with the indigenous people for the purpose of trade, principally many cattle, so too the indigenous people are nurturing their relationship with the Company for the purpose of trade, by promising many cattle. But many cattle are not forthcoming, only a few, and the Company begins to worry whether they can meet the demands of not only those stationed at the Cape but their primary constituency, the passing ships. While they do make headway with establishing a garden of agricultural produce, using both local and continental plants, they can only hope for the promised cattle. In the Journal entry of the 28th, 29th, and 30th July 1652 they are confident that they “shall be able to supply all the ships with vegetables”, but there are no cattle as yet for either the sick on the land or the soon to be expected ships at sea.¹¹⁸ A month later, on the 12th August, they are still waiting. Religion and cattle converge:

We have . . . obtained nothing from the natives to date except—as already stated—one lean cow and a calf when we first arrived at the beginning of April. Up to now, with all the hard work, we have had to content ourselves with stale food and occasionally some Cape greens and a little Dutch radish and salad, until such time as God our Lord will be pleased to let us obtain some other and more food.¹¹⁹

The rhythms of the Company “treating” the natives with “wine and tobacco” and the natives promising “an abundance of cattle” continue,¹²⁰ month after month, year after year. Surrounded by so many cattle, but unable to acquire them, the Company even begins to fantasize at regular intervals about abandoning their policy of amicable trade, wondering aloud in the Journal about how they might lure the indigenous peoples “to come to us, on the pretence of wanting to barter copper for their cattle”, but “then, having them in our power, we should kill them with their women and children and take their cattle”.¹²¹

117 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 44.

118 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 53.

119 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 55.

120 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 71, 9th October 1652.

121 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 80, 13th November 1652; 112, 13th December 1652; 116, 18th December 1652; 212, 7th February 1654; 229, 12th April 1654; 306, 7th April 1655.

Cattle do begin to trickle in as part of the emerging trade, but only very few and of a quality that mitigates against using them as breeding stock.

Gradually the Company comes to recognise that the indigenous people appear “to be loath to part with their cattle”.¹²² Even when local trade does pick up, in early December of 1652, in the summer, acquiring cattle remains a problem, “for the natives part with them reluctantly”. The entry then goes on immediately to interpret this reluctance, saying “... as we pretend to do with the copper plate”.¹²³ The Company assumes that, as with them, trade is the highest goal for their African hosts, and that, like them, the indigenous peoples are attempting to drive up the price of cattle by showing a reluctance to barter them, for they have “cattle in countless numbers”.¹²⁴ The Dutch assume that just as they themselves value copper plate above copper wire, so too the local peoples value cattle above sheep, for they “were more reluctant to part with their cattle than with their sheep”.¹²⁵ They also assume, following the same logic, that when the natives are “not eager to trade”, though they have “thousands of cattle grazing in the vicinity of the fort”, that “they have already been glutted with copper”.¹²⁶ But as we will see, African logic with respect to cattle is different.

Determined to trade, yet anxious to protect their tenuous hold on the Cape, the Company continues to project its own mixed messages. The proximity of large herds of cattle—“we saw on the slope beside the Table Mountain the pasturage and the country all around covered with sheep and cattle like grass on the veld”—while offering the prospect of trade, also causes anxiety. The Dutch are informed by “Saldanhars” that they “intend bringing their huts and settling down close to us”, and although the Dutch respond publically that “this would be good and would give us pleasure”, privately they confess that “we would have preferred not to have them make their abode so near to us, as they are countless in number and we are not yet too well entrenched ourselves”.¹²⁷ Welcoming with one hand, the Dutch redeploy their soldier-workers whenever large African groups visit the area with the other hand, being careful to document in the Journal exactly how many of the Company are so deployed and what their primary responsibilities are.¹²⁸ They are also anxious that the

122 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 105, 29th November 1652.

123 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 107.

124 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 108.

125 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 108, 7th December 1652.

126 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 115, 18th December 1652.

127 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 107.

128 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 111. On this day, the 11th December 1652 there are altogether 125 in the Company, including thirty soldiers.

“thousands of cattle and sheep” of the “Saldanhars” might ‘mingle’ with their fledgling herd.¹²⁹

Overall, however, the enduring anxiety is that they are not able to “get the bartering properly underway”. For example, in this case, with thousands of cattle close by, “they would offer a lean, inferior beast and a sheep or two for sale, with the result that no more than 20 sheep, 2 cows and 5 calves were obtained, they being very unwilling to part with any more cattle”. “It is very sad”, this Journal entry for the 13th December continues, “to behold such fine herds of cattle and to be unable to purchase anything worth while; and although, to allure them and to make them eager, we offered them $\frac{1}{3}$ more copper than previously for each beast, and in addition treated them with all the friendliness in the world, they could not be swayed”.¹³⁰ The desperateness of the Dutch becomes evident in this entry as it continues: “Whether they have already been glutted with copper (their being perhaps no consumption of it among them), or whether they are holding back out of envy or mischievous incitement, we cannot really tell. If only we could know!”¹³¹

It is at moments like this that the fantasy of seizure returns. The entry continues: “—for it would be a pity to see these herds leave without being able to do further trading. To-day we had ample opportunity of depriving them of 10,000 head of cattle had we been allowed to do so”. Then, referring directly to their implied readers, they add,

If we are ordered to do this, it can always be done at some future date; this would suit us even better, for the Saldaniers trust us more and more as the days go by. Once we had possession of so many cattle, we could maintain an adequate supply by breeding; moreover we should have no fear of the English touching here and spoiling the cattle trade with the natives. These people daily give us sufficient cause by stealing and carrying away our possessions; we are so often subjected to this that we that we have enough reason for taking revenge by capturing them or their cattle. If one cannot get the cattle from them by friendly trading, why should one then suffer their thieving without making any reprisal? This would only be necessary once: with 150 men ten or twelve thousand cattle could be secured without the danger of losing a single person. On the other hand many savages could be captured without a blow as they always come to us unarmed; they could then be sent to India as slaves. This, however, requires more consideration and wiser judgement than ours alone; it is

129 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 112.

130 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 112.

131 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 112.

only in passing that we refer to it on this occasion. It could be considered and deliberated more fully later on, after more experience, in the event of our receiving higher orders to that effect.¹³²

The quasi-religious argument, based on a Reformed theology of retribution, that the local Africans 'deserve' having their cattle taken and themselves being enslaved is sustained across a range of entries in the Journal. Later, as the Company takes the local peoples land, they return to this argument, reiterating it both to themselves and explaining its 'logic' to the natives they have dispossessed.

During this particular season of trade in 1652 in which they obtain "only 88 cattle and 269 sheep, young and old", the Company complains that "every day they want more and more copper for the cattle". Though reluctant to give in to this increase, "we shall have to give more", because "[w]e must first obtain a good number of cattle, then in due course, through breeding, we can become independent".¹³³ This is a turning point in the Company's project, for they now recognise that they may not be able to rely on the bartering of cattle for their supply to the ships. Implicit in this shift in strategy is that the Company will now have to acquire land on which to pasture the cattle.

The Company's confusion continues, unable as they are to grasp the very different social location of cattle in the respective religio-cultural and socio-economic worlds. "They are an extraordinary people: when we believe that we have won them over and are making good progress, they suddenly withdraw and drive away their cattle as if they were terrified of something, although we do everything in our power to satisfy them in every way".¹³⁴ As the pattern continues, the Company reluctantly recognises that if the African clans do not want (more and more) copper, if "they have already been glutted with copper; if this is so, the cattle trade will not advance much".¹³⁵ Again, when faced with a partial recognition of the limits of their model of trade, they resort to reflecting on the use of force: "If, then, there is no longer any trade to be expected, would

132 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 112. See also Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 113, 114. See also Shell, "A Family Matter: The Sale and Transfer of Human Beings at the Cape, 1658 to 1830," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 25, no. 2 (1992).

133 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 113.

134 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 115.

135 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 115–116. As trade continues, it is tobacco that becomes the key commodity, for this is consumed in a way that copper is not consumed; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 116.

it matter so much if one deprived them of some 6 or 8 thousand cattle?"¹³⁶ "It is really too sad", the Journal entry of the 18th December 1652 concludes, having outlined yet again how easy it would be to conquer these African peoples, "to see so great a number of cattle, to remain so much in need of them for the refreshment of the Company's ships, and yet to be unable to obtain anything worth while in return for merchandise and kind treatment".¹³⁷

With the waning of what the Company understands to be the trading 'season' in cattle, the Journal entries turn more to the gardens, which are doing well, though even here their thoughts turn to cattle, for "the cattle are very useful—an additional reason for wishing that the natives had brought us an abundance", because the soil would be even more fertile should it be manured.¹³⁸ Furthermore, had the Africans traded more of their cattle, "we could also have kept milch cows in addition to the cattle required for the refreshment of the ships".¹³⁹

And yet another factor emerges to shift the Company towards establishing its own 'independent' herd of cattle, namely the growing worry that the English will circumvent the Dutch monopoly on trade in cattle.¹⁴⁰ Later, the same concern will be raised with respect to the Dutch *burghers* (settler-farmers), who were inclined to establish their own trade relations with the African locals, undermining the Company's profits.¹⁴¹ But for now, the reality is that there are not enough cattle and sheep to provide more than "a rather modest supply of fresh meat . . . for the ships".¹⁴² Again, God is invoked: "We shall live in good hope, however, until such time as it may please the Almighty to send us a better supply".¹⁴³ With each group of African "newcomers", the same hope is expressed and the same paucity in trade in cattle is experienced. There are "a countless multitude of cattle", but relatively few for barter.¹⁴⁴

136 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 116.

137 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 116.

138 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 117.

139 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 117.

140 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 117–118.

141 Indeed, such is the case with the ordinary Company workers, and a "Proclamation" is issued on the 12th of October 1654 'prohibiting' "all persons, whomsoever, high or low, from henceforth buying, bartering, or otherwise procuring or receiving from these natives . . . directly or indirectly . . ."; Moodie, *The Record*, 54. A similar prohibition had already been issued on the 22nd August 1654, but not in such strong terms; Moodie, *The Record*, 53.

142 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 118.

143 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 118.

144 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 122–123.

As 1653 begins the daily rhythms continue,¹⁴⁵ punctuated by the regular “divine service”, either officiated by a visiting *predikant* from one of the passing ships or the resident sieketrooster,¹⁴⁶ but with no specific reference to the Bible.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the sieketrooster, Willem Barentssen Wijlant, is redeployed on the 6th of January, as head of an expedition, “accompanied by a few soldiers . . . with copper and tobacco . . . to obtain by barter as many cattle as possible”.¹⁴⁸ Shifting strategy—“[w]e have noticed that we have to seek them as apparently they do not want to come to us, being a very lazy people”¹⁴⁹—the Company goes out to the local clans in the vicinity, choosing perhaps to send the sieketrooster because of his vocation as a “*voorganger*” (the one who goes before), though there is no overt religious motivation even hinted at in the Journal. The sending of the sieketrooster, with armed men, to trade cattle becomes a regular component of the Company’s trading strategies.¹⁵⁰

By the time the large body of “Saldanhars” leave the vicinity of the fort, in January 1653, the various trading strategies have generated “a reasonable number of cattle”, including “25 fine milch cows, a bull and several fine young oxen and heifers, most suitable for breeding purposes”.¹⁵¹ But it is becoming clearer and clearer that, clan after clan, “[t]hese people are very reluctant to part with their cattle”, valuing their cattle highly.¹⁵² The ongoing reality, nearly a year after their arrival, is therefore one of scarcity, with the “the men here on land” complaining “that as a result of the continual work and the scantiness of the food they have become very tired and weak in the legs, which has also daily become more evident to us”.¹⁵³

What further complicates the establishment of trading patterns is that the Company at the Cape has disrupted and interfered with the long history of direct local African trade with the passing ships. The Company has been at the Cape for a year when it becomes apparent that various clans “appear to be returning for the expected arrival of the ships—after which they often enquire”.¹⁵⁴ The Company at the Cape quickly intervenes, over against their

145 The Journal also reflects the wider geo-political shifts taking place; see for example the entry about the Netherlands being at war with England; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 138.

146 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 168.

147 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 123.

148 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 124.

149 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 125.

150 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 126.

151 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 127.

152 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 129, 137.

153 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 142.

154 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 144.

own ships, insisting that, “in order not to spoil the trade, it will be necessary for all the ships to hand in their copper here at the fort. The trade will not be prejudiced but will be maintained on a sound footing”.¹⁵⁵ Attempting to assert control on a context they only partially understand, the Dutch are trapped in their own logic of trade. The Africans recognise this logic and so use it to navigate their trading relationships with the Company. Promises by each ‘new’ set of “strange natives” that comes to the Cape to graze their livestock and/or to trade concerning “still other natives living further inland who would come along when they heard about us” continue.¹⁵⁶ Even though such promises cause the Company to worry about “our supply of copper and tobacco” running out,¹⁵⁷ the mythical herds of tradable cattle do not materialise, even when the heralded strange new natives do appear.¹⁵⁸

And then a new (indigenous) element is added to the trade in cattle. Having slowly constituted a small herd of cattle over months and months, and a few days after Van Riebeeck’s wife “was delivered of a son” (Abraham), with the Company gradually coming to terms with the rhythms of the interior clans and their semi-nomadic habits,¹⁵⁹ all seems well. However, on Sunday 19th October 1653, “After divine service we were informed that Harry (employed as interpreter and living within a pistol-shot of the fort) had quite suddenly packed up and left with wife, children, huts and all his belongings while we were attending the service. Do not know what it might mean. He had been with us in the fort just before the sermon, but said not a word about this nor showed the slightest sign. . .”.¹⁶⁰ Having “not paid much attention” to “Harry’s” movements on previous occasions,¹⁶¹ the Dutch are completely unprepared for the news that follows: “all the Company’s cattle, 44 in number, were carried off during the sermon”.¹⁶² Furthermore, it is discovered that the young Dutch man who had been tending the cattle “had been murdered by these people”.¹⁶³

Significantly, in each of the records of this event, religious observance is foregrounded. The Journal entry cited above uses “divine service” as the frame for

155 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 144.

156 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 153.

157 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 153.

158 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 154, 156, 160.

159 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 171–174.

160 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 179.

161 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 179.

162 As the news is reported in a “Resolution of the Council” on 21 October 1653; Moodie, *The Record*. This is not the first theft of Company cattle or the last raid on Company cattle; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 129, 179. The reverberations of this raid continue as the years pass; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 203.

163 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 179.

the event, and goes on to record that it is “[a]fter evening prayers” that news of where the cattle have been taken is received.¹⁶⁴ In the “Resolution to Council” of 21 October 1653 it is recorded that the cattle “were carried off during the sermon on Sunday last”,¹⁶⁵ and in the “Proclamation” of 21 October it is recorded that the both the murder of the young man who was herding the cattle and the theft of the cattle took place “during the divine service on Sunday last”.¹⁶⁶ This reiteration serves both to assure the primary implied readers that the Company at the Cape has not been negligent, for they were engaged in what was expected and required on a Sunday, participation in formal Reformed faith observance, and to represent the full extent of the “faithlessness” of the local Africans who were responsible.¹⁶⁷

Those sent in pursuit of the cattle are unable to track them, and although devastated by this loss, particularly the loss of “the milch cows and fine breeding stock”, and the betrayal they feel at having been “mightily deceived by Harry, whom we employed as interpreter and whom we always acknowledged as the chief of this little tribe living with us”, the Company at the Cape is even more worried about the effect this will have on their relations with other clans.¹⁶⁸ As the Journal entry for the 20th October records, “This whole difficulty is surmountable, however, if only the Saldanhars are not deterred from coming to us by this thieving of the Strandlopers, in the fear that we should revenge ourselves on the”.

We hope, however, and with the guidance of God do not doubt that we shall soon obtain others from the Saldanhars. We bartered 8 sheep from them only the evening before last and they had left quite content with the kind treatment given them, promising to return soon with an abundance of cattle and sheep. May God grant it, as we have at present no more left than 60-odd sheep, one milch cow, one ox and 4 newly born calves, the rest having been taken from us most thievishly and faithlessly by these Standlopers as aforesaid and driven away very suddenly yesterday morning while we were at divine service. May God make amends.¹⁶⁹

164 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 180.

165 Moodie, *The Record*, 36.

166 Moodie, *The Record*, 37.

167 Moodie, *The Record*, 37. The reiteration becomes an integral part of almost every recounting of the event; see Moodie, *The Record*.

168 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 181.

169 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 181.

Immediately a “Proclamation” is issued, on the 21st October 1653, the substance of which is also recorded in the Journal entry for that day, forbidding retribution against those who have stolen the Company’s cattle:

The Commander and Council aforesaid, have nevertheless deemed it for the service of the Company, and on many and sundry considerations, have thought fit to order and direct, as is hereby ordered and directed, under severe punishment—That no one, on meeting, here at the Fort or elsewhere, any of inhabitants, whether Saldanhaman or Waterman, the stealers of our said cattle, aye even our late interpreter Herry, apparently the chief author of the robbery, and also absent, shall do to them on that account, any the least harm or injury, but shall on the contrary show them every kindness and friendship, aye more than even heretofore, as if the late outrage had never happened, or at least was totally forgotten by us; so that the Saldanhars be not thereby frightened from coming to us again, but that, observing our good nature, they may become the more attached and accustomed to us, so that we may, not only speedily procure other cattle from those daily expected here, and trade with them, but also that we may continue the more safely to frequent the roads in all directions. . . .¹⁷⁰

The Journal entry urges “our people” to “forget and forgive them the harm done to us, nor ever recall it”, particularly as “as the main season for trading is now fast approaching”.¹⁷¹ Even the unrelenting strictures of retribution theology are set aside (for the moment) in the interests of trade. Furthermore, the Company is aware of their vulnerability in this strange and foreign land, with “the roads in all directions” controlled by Africans and with Africans being in control of the cattle they need for the refreshment of the trade ships.

On one of these roads the Dutch working in the forest sight a group of “Saldanhars”, who are recognised as including “a certain captain from whom we had bartered many cattle last year and who had once of his own accord returned an ox to us which had strayed and been written off”.¹⁷² This captain indicates that the clan with the stolen cattle had approached him to allow them to “live with them”, but that he, aware that the cattle had been stolen “from us in bad faith”, had made it clear that they wanted nothing to do with them. “He would gladly show us”, the entry continues, “where Harry was camped in order

¹⁷⁰ Moodie, *The Record*, 37.

¹⁷¹ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 182.

¹⁷² Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 183.

that we might recover our cattle, if only we would accompany them thither with a few men and firearms".¹⁷³ However, what is interpreted to be an African act of solidarity with the Dutch, a portent perhaps of extensive trade with this captain in cattle, turns out to be yet more misunderstanding. For, when pressed a few days later, "the Saldanhars had not the confidence to accompany our men in pursuit of Harry" and the cattle.¹⁷⁴ Pursuit of the cattle continues, but the Dutch "had not been able to overtake them".¹⁷⁵ What is more, the anticipated trade in cattle with the "Saldanhars" does not materialise.

Unable to understand the local internal dynamics among the clans associated with the Cape, the Dutch become desperate, and eventually on the 4th of November 1653, those working in the forest "seized an old Hottentot on the way and brought him to the fort—not by force, however, beyond leading him with a man at each side holding one of his hands".¹⁷⁶ The restraint of the Company ruptures, as it repeatedly does. And what follows indicates the extent of the miscommunication, as complex 'conversations' are conducted without a mutually understood language:

We set him free, and, because we found him to be a Saldanhar (having noticed him among the Saldanhars last year) we had his belly and also his knapsack liberally filled with bread. We made him a generous presentation of some tobacco and a little copper wire, so that he recovered from his fright and satisfied by our friendly treatment, stayed the night, sleeping in the fort of is own accord. Showed him a large quantity of tobacco and copper, intimating to him that he tell his people we wished to trade these with them for cattle and other goods, as we did last season. Thereupon he have us to understand that many Saldanhars were on their way hither and also that Harry had gone far inland. Could not obtain quite the best information from him, however, as he could not speak a word of Dutch or English, so that whatever we understood from him we gathered from words of his own language which we had somehow learned from experience.¹⁷⁷

173 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 183.

174 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 184.

175 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 185.

176 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 187. 'Seizing' is part of the vocabulary of imperialism, and includes the seizure of the ships of other imperial powers, such as the English; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 152.

177 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 187.

The quest for cattle and information and understanding continues, in the midst of the steady, but subdued rhythm of religious life, including both the public 'folk' form of ordinary popular religion and the more formal religion of prayers,¹⁷⁸ Sunday divine service and the reading of the sermon,¹⁷⁹ the Lord's Supper (if a *predikant* was present from a passing ship),¹⁸⁰ births,¹⁸¹ baptisms,¹⁸² marriage,¹⁸³ and death.¹⁸⁴ The sieketrooster continues to do his regular religious work out of sight and record, but is recognised in the public record for his bartering role, for which he is becoming recognised too by the local African people.¹⁸⁵ It is perhaps because these encounters are often couched in fear of the other, from both sides,¹⁸⁶ that the sieketrooster is deployed. Fearfulness increases as the Company becomes more settled, with certain African clans recognising that the fort and its environs is a site of resources, both for trading and raiding. As the Company 'employs' more locals for the menial tasks, like fetching firewood for the cooks, loath as the local peoples are to undertake the more strenuous labour the Company had hoped,¹⁸⁷ so too the opportunity for raiding increases.¹⁸⁸ The Company is reluctant to restrict such local access, as they need these local natives both for their labour and "for the sake of the cattle trade".¹⁸⁹

When the tension with the local peoples becomes particularly acute, as when "a certain troop of Saldanhars" approaches and it is recognised that among their many cattle "almost all our stolen cattle", it is the sieketrooster, "who is well known to them", who is sent out on the 28th January 1654, "accompanied by 19 well-armed soldiers . . . to barter from the natives as many cattle and sheep as possible".¹⁹⁰ However, of the "fully 1,100 or 1,200 head of cattle and sheep", the sieketrooster returns to the fort only "with 2 of the beasts stolen

178 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 75, 180.

179 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 31, 93, 123, 188.

180 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 39, 269–270, 296, 306, 339, 363, 364, 368.

181 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 43, 179.

182 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 168, 359.

183 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 192. In the absence of a proper *predikant*, this marriage would have been a "purely civil marriage"; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 192, note 1.

184 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 41, 42, 292.

185 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 195.

186 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 195–197.

187 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 157.

188 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 200.

189 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 200.

190 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 207.

from us”; it is clear, once again, that these local Africans “were not at all disposed to trade with us”.¹⁹¹ The Company suspects complicity between the clan who stole the Company’s cattle and this clan, with a tendency to blame “Harry”,¹⁹² who looms large in the Journal, personalising what is a more complex network of relationships among the diverse African clans of this region.

When once again, in the wake of this disappointment, the Company reflects in the Journal on how they might “seize them”, a new element in the argument is articulated. While the loss of the cattle as well as the death of the young man who was watching the cattle when the raid took place are regularly lamented, on this occasion both are cloaked in emotive Christian language and metaphor, as the Company records how hard it is not to “seize them”, especially when they “see before our eyes our cattle as well as the thieves who stole them, and besides still to have to show them friendship instead of taking righteous vengeance and payment for the loss and affront suffered and the shedding of Christian blood”.¹⁹³ Invoking “righteous vengeance” and the “shedding of Christian blood” shifts elements of the more formal Reformed Christian Religion into the public realm, alongside the more familiar folk religion.

The Journal entry continues, reflecting at length on the logic of retribution as a reasonable strategy with respect to the acquiring of cattle. The tone, however, has become more militant, as we listen in on the Company’s stream of consciousness reflections. Moving from the invocation of a wrong against their religion, they again enumerate how many cattle there are and how few Africans there are managing the herds and in so doing moot the possibility of overpowering them (with their own relatively meagre forces). The argument is no longer only that the Company has the power, so they imagine, to seize African cattle and people, but that this is a just ‘payment’: “it would perhaps be a better proposition to pay out this guilty gang, taking the cattle to use for refreshment and our own use, as stated, and their persons as slaves in chains for fetching firewood and doing other necessary labour”.¹⁹⁴

Retribution is now offered as the rationale for changing their trading policy. Though the Bible is not overtly invoked, there are allusions to the biblical notion of ‘what you sow you shall reap’, a pervasive theological trajectory in the wisdom literature of the Bible, particularly evident in the books of Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Job. That there may be biblical allusions here is borne out by the reference to forcing “this tribe of natives” to fetch firewood

191 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 207.

192 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 207–208, Moodie, *The Record*, 57.

193 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 208.

194 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 208–209, and see also 212.

and do other menial tasks of labour. The story of the so-called ‘curse on Ham’ in Genesis 9:25–27, in which the descendants of Ham will become the slaves of the descendants of the two elder brothers (who represent the ‘whiter’ races), has a long history of reception as a story about the sons of Cush (a son of Ham’s) being the ‘black races’, whose destiny it is to be, as it is stated in Joshua 9:23, “hewers of wood and drawers of water”.

Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying, “Why have you deceived us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ when you are living within our land? Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.” (Joshua 9:22–23 NAS)

En Jozua riep hen, en sprak tot hen, zeggende: Waarom hebt gijlieden ons bedrogen, zeggende: Wij zijn zeer verre van ulieden gezeten, daar gij in het midden van ons zijt wonende ? Nu dan, vervloekt zijt gijlieden ! en onder ulieden zullen niet afgesneden worden knechten, noch houthouwers, noch waterputters ten huize mijns Gods. (Joshua 9:22–23 Dutch Statenvertaling, 1637)

The Journal entry adds yet a further consideration, saying that the course of action being outlined is one that, “Our men daily urge this and request us to do so”.¹⁹⁵ In a “Despatch from Commander Van Riebeeck to Chamber XVII”, dated 22 April 1654, a similar set of arguments is put forward, but with another element added. Van Riebeeck argues that should the Company at the Cape receive authorization from Holland “to seize them with all their cattle”, “we can perceive that other tribes will not sympathize with them”, though it is acknowledged that “the other tribes” may “at first be a little shy from needless fears; but this we can easily remove by sending to them . . . presents of tobacco, a little brass, bread, and arrack, by which means they are easily to be enticed, and their fears allayed by kind treatment”.¹⁹⁶ “It would therefore not be out of place”, the Journal entry version continues, “if our Lords and Masters would be pleased to deliberate upon this point, as next season we should have a no less suitable opportunity of taking rightful revenge and indemnifying ourselves; in the meantime we shall be forbearing until such time as we may receive your

195 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 209.

196 Moodie, *The Record*, 49–50.

instructions".¹⁹⁷ Instructions to seize the cattle do not come; but slowly and incrementally African land is seized.

The local African clans in the area notice a change in the militarisation of the area controlled by the Company at this time, and they express their fear that the increase in the number of armed soldiers (now totalling twenty) around the fort is a sign of coercive intent, "and asked us a hundred times whether we intend seizing them or their cattle".¹⁹⁸ They notice too that their land is being taken as the Company attempts to establish its own herd and settle its own people.

In the meantime, however, trade does take place, even if not in the quantities envisaged by the Company. Every opportunity to promote trade is taken. On the 10th of March 1654, for example, there is a entry that records how the Company's surgeon, perhaps assisted by the sieketrooster, is asked by a local "chief" with a wounded knee to "restore his former health", a request which is granted "and the surgeon was recommended to apply his utmost skill to cure the chief, in order that these people might become all the more obliged, kindly disposes and accustomed to us, etc.". ¹⁹⁹ The Company also continues to explore their surrounds, both to identify yet more "tribes" with whom they might trade and to diversify their resources and profit.²⁰⁰ For example, extensive experiments are conducted on whether it is profitable to slaughter seals for their skins and oil.²⁰¹ In this regard, the Company costs what "is an essential for Netherlanders if you want them to do any work", and concludes that "it would be very much cheaper to have the agricultural work, seal-catching and all the other necessary work done by slaves in return for a plain fare of rice and fish or seal and penguin meat alone and without pay".²⁰² Slavery is a part of the fabric of empire, and so the Company is aware that slaves "could be obtained and brought very cheaply from Madagascar, together with rice, in one voyage".²⁰³

197 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 209, see also 229, 246, 249, 254, 306, 312, 314–315.

198 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 208.

199 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 218–219, see also 228. Later, the Company makes use of the knowledge of "Hottentot surgeons"; Thom ed, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II* (111 vols.; Cape Town and Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, for The Van Riebeeck Society, 1952), 382.

200 This includes the Company's search for fabled minerals like gold and silver; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 301.

201 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 221.

202 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 224, 335.

203 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 224, see also 275. The slaves from Madagascar and elsewhere that the Company enslaves at the Cape regular seek their freedom; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 300. See also the essays in Elphick, and Giliomee,

And as indicated, the Company has imagined using the local African people as slaves, going so far, in the third year of their stay to declare: "It will have to happen one day or we shall derive no benefit from them at all, for they are already beginning to fancy that we stand in awe of them."²⁰⁴

The Mundane Bible: Company Rhythms at the Cape

Amidst such contradictions the second anniversary of the Company's arrival at the Cape is celebrated (unlike the first anniversary, which passes without comment in the Journal). On this occasion folk religion and the more formal religion combine:

To-day [6 April 1654] is the second anniversary of our safe arrival with the ships *Drommedaris*, *Reijger* and *Goede Hoop* at this place through the Holy guidance of God to build this fortress and establish this settlement according to the instructions of our Lords and Masters, and the Lord God has hitherto given His abundant blessing to the satisfactory and successful accomplishment of all these matters.

We have therefore resolved, and also for the first time begun to celebrate this 6th day of April in the name of the Almighty, and henceforth to set it aside for all time as a day of thanksgiving and prayer, so that our descendants may never forget the mercies we have received at the Lord's hands, but may always remember them to the Glory of God.²⁰⁵

God's abundant blessing is not however always obvious, for in the month of April itself, in an entry for the 18th April, the record asserts that "the position here is pretty bad and it will be necessary for much of the work to be discontinued in

The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840. (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 1988); Eldredge, and Morton, *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier*. (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, and Pietermaritzburg: Westview Press and University of Natal Press, 1994).

204 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 229.

205 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 226. The 22nd of July is another commemorated day, as a "day of prayer appointed by the Hon. Governor-General and Councillors of India for the whole of India and all places under their authority"; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 251. When the 6th of April 1659 is commemorated, it is commemorated as the "Anniversary of the occupation of this Cape by the Hon. Company"; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol III*, 30.

order that the men may search for food”.²⁰⁶ While worrying about the logistics of fulfilling their mandate to refresh the ships, the Journal entries regularly report that, “Nothing particular has happened, except . . .”.²⁰⁷ Life for the Company at the Cape is becoming mundane. A feature of this ordinariness is the regular arrival and departure of ships, the core business of the Company at the Cape, and a business that draws upon the primary task of the sieketrooster, for with every ship there are sick that need to be cared for. For example, on the 14th August 1654 it is recorded that even though the ship *Angelier* has made a “speedy voyage . . . she has quite a number of sick and scorbutics, so that we immediately sent on board a quantity of greens from the gardens and gave orders for the sick to be brought ashore to-morrow so that they may the sooner be nursed and refreshed”.²⁰⁸

At exactly the time that the *Angelier* arrives from the Netherlands, three other ships are about to set out for Batavia. Among the letters they bear is a letter from Van Riebeeck to the Rev. Tessemaker of Batavia, “in which Van Riebeeck answers a complaint made by the Church Council of Batavia, namely, that the Cape’s sick-comforter, Willem Barentssen Wijlant, went beyond the limits of his authority in addressing the people in his own words instead of reading a [prescribed] sermon”. The sick-comforter’s excuse was that bad eyesight compelled him to learn the sermon by heart, so that he would not “break down” while reading. He claimed that although he always held the book of prescribed sermons in his hand, he did often look over it, giving the impression perhaps that he was not reading. Though representing the sieketrooster’s excuse, “Van Riebeeck, however, undertook to see that the offence should not be repeated”.²⁰⁹ What is clear from this exchange of correspondence is that the sieketrooster, though located in a remote outpost of the Dutch empire, was nevertheless under surveillance by both church and civil authorities.

This first sieketrooster, Wijlant, does not speak extensively for himself, for though expected to submit regular reports “*met alle schepen*” (with all ships), which was not practical, he actually only sent one report in the four years

206 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 231, see also 233. When provisions do arrive via ship, such as on the 22nd July 1654, there is thanksgiving: “In our extreme need, bordering on famine, and beyond expectations, we received these provisions. For all these abundant blessings and generosity shown to us from time to time and particularly in the success of our enterprise here, may the triune God be greatly praised for ever and evermore. Amen”; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 252.

207 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 236, 237.

208 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 248, 249, 255, see also 261, 267, 295.

209 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 255, note 1.

he served at the Cape.²¹⁰ In this report (1655), addressed both to the *Classis* (Presbytery) of Amsterdam who had sent him and to the Lord's Seventeen (as required by Article 6 of the "*Instructie*" of 1617), Wijlant outlines the routine work of the sieketrooter, but also includes his work among the local African people (not including his role as barterer of cattle). He reports on how he has attempted, but without success, "to instruct the natives in reading and writing".²¹¹ He writes as follows, revealing the tenets of the theological system within which he works:

They will not remain with one, for twice already have I got one of their youths to stay with me, whom I desired to benefit, and to teach reading and writing, and from whom I also hoped to learn their language, in order by that means to bring them to the light of the truth. But it did not prove a success, for they are so accustomed to run wild, that they cannot place themselves in subjection to us, so that there seems to be little hope for this people. But what it may please the great God to do to them is known to his omnipotence, which is able to draw them out of the darkness, and to bring them to the light of his Son, Jesus Christ. In the meantime I shall consider it my bounden duty to employ all possible means . . . to deliver them out of the hands and bonds of Satan; for it is something to be heartily desired that it may please God some time to reveal his grace to them, since they are a very poor and miserable people, whom one can scarcely look upon without tears.²¹²

That the locals do not want to leave their way of life and live with the Dutch is incomprehensible to the sieketrooter and the Company. While the indigenous peoples do derive benefits from their trade with and proximity to the Dutch, they never imagine that the Dutch will remain.²¹³ Like the ships that pass the Cape, so too, the Dutch will move on. But not only do they not move on, there are clear signs that they are settling, and in so doing threatening both the religio-cultural and the socio-economic dimensions of African life at the Cape.

²¹⁰ Claasen, *Die Sieketrooters in Suid-Afrika*, 76, see also 73–77.

²¹¹ Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 24.

²¹² Cited in Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 25. The Journal would express similar sentiments a year later; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 40.

²¹³ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 323.

The Indigenous Bible: Land and Cattle as Religion

On the 10th February 1655 the indigenous people at the Cape make it clear that, besides their own subsistence needs, there is another dimension to their reluctance to trade their cattle. They explain, the entry records, “that we were living upon their land and they perceived that we were rapidly building more and more as if we intended never to leave, and for that reason they would not trade with us for any more cattle, as we took the best pasture for our cattle, etc.”.²¹⁴ Though this argument is delivered “in broken English”,²¹⁵ its import is clear. Not only are cattle integral to their identity in ways that the Company cannot imagine, but cattle are also their link to the land.

The local clan begins to assert its ownership of the land, as the Journal continues to record. Against the backdrop of the Company “almost forced to do our work with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other all the time”, the Journal goes on to record, “about 50 of these natives wanted to put up their huts close to the banks of the moat of our fortress, and when told in a friendly manner by our men to go a little further away, they declared boldly that this was not our land but theirs and that they would place their huts wherever they chose”. The local clan goes on to elaborate, saying that, “If we were not disposed to permit them to do so they would attack us with the aid of a large number of people from the interior and kill us, pointing out that the ramparts were only constructed of earth and scum [sic] and could easily be surmounted by them”.²¹⁶

These words are given the force by the proximity of so many Africans and their multiple herds of cattle, so that “we are becoming more apprehensive every day, more particularly because we can see from the large number of fires burning everywhere that the land hereabouts is full of Hottentots, and our men, without giving any provocation, suffer much annoyance from them even close to the fortress”. The same Journal entry continues, outlining the Company’s dilemma, saying, “We dare not, however, resist them too much, as we still enjoy to a fair extent the convenience of their assistance in fetching firewood, although we almost have to beg and beseech them to do so, and whenever the whim seizes them they simply refuse altogether”.²¹⁷

In May 1655, with another year at the Cape having passed for the Company, they remain perplexed by the reluctance of the local peoples to part with their

214 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 292. The gardens of the Company have also been expanding; see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 304.

215 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 292.

216 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 293.

217 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 293.

cattle. One of their assumptions is that it is the most local clan, 'Harry's clan', that is responsible for being either the broker or the barrier between them and other 'tribes': "To-day bartered one beast and 2 sheep from strange natives who are at present appearing at our settlement in large numbers and with a fair number of cattle, but at the instigation of Harry's allies—at least, so we imagine—they are very reluctant to part with these".²¹⁸ The Company is guessing, trying to make sense of a reality that eludes them.

The Company learns more about local custom and cattle a few days later. In the following exchange, on the 30th May 1655, one of the local clans elaborates, speaking for themselves (via the Journal):

In the afternoon the Commander himself went to their camp and spoke to them. We proposed to them that they might give their cattle to us and in return always live under our protection and with their wives and children enjoy food without care or trouble. They would be assured that none of their enemies could in any way harm or molest them, and in this way they could continue to be the good and fast friends of the Hollanders, etc.

To this they replied that they wished to remain good friends with us and, as stated before, would for a bellyful of food, tabacco and arrack, etc., fetch firewood for the cooks; but as to parting with their cattle, that could not be.

We thereupon pointed out that we did not wish to have their cattle for nothing, but wanted to pay for them with copper and tobacco to their satisfaction, and that we, on the other hand, would be content with the service they would thereby be rendering to us, and so forth.

They rejoined that they could not part with their cattle, either by sale or gift, as they had to subsist on the milk, but that there were other tribes in the interior, and when these came hither we could get sufficient [cattle].²¹⁹

Here this local people, only one of the many peoples that populate the southern part of Africa, try to explain the inseparability of their cattle from who they are. Though one of the more vulnerable clans in the region, and though they are tempted at times to find refuge from the neighbouring larger clans

²¹⁸ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 311, but see 314 and 320–321 as the Dutch recognise the complexity of local relationships.

²¹⁹ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 313.

within the confines of Company controlled land, they nevertheless cannot imagine being separated from their cattle. “[T]hat could not be”.

A day later the cattle themselves teach Van Riebeeck and the Company another aspect of the integrity of an African cattle culture. During the night of the 1st of June 1655 a leopard entered the Company’s fowl-house. Two of the Company’s men, a groom and the sick-comforter, try to kill or catch the leopard, but are themselves attacked, and the leopard flees. Because the cattle kraal is nearby, their attention is drawn to the cattle.

Something remarkable was observed among our cattle in the kraal, which is near the hen-house, the stable and the hospital. As soon as they became aware of the leopard in the fowl-house they all collected in a body with their horns towards the door and formed a crescent, so that the leopard had all he could do to keep clear of their horns and escape—even though, by their bellowing, these animals gave ample evidence of their terror of the wild beast. Indeed, we have often noticed that leopards, lions and tigers are unable to harm cattle when they form themselves into a protective circle, so that not a single one of the calves inside is carried off by the wild beasts—a wonderful sight to see.²²⁰

Though the Company recognises this wonder, they do not make the associations they might. The cattle are “a body”, a single entity, integrally related to each other and to those they link to the land, each other, the ancestors, and God. No wonder the indigenous Africans for whom cattle are so important are reluctant to part with their cattle. Cattle are not commodities but an integral element in the fabric of their religio-cultural and socio-economic lives. Though the Journal does not recognise or record what others may recognise as an overt instance of the religio-cultural dimension of cattle in the lives of these African peoples, there is perhaps a glimpse of such a recognition, in an entry that reports on an incident that took place well away from the fort. While there is no record of ritual slaughtering of cattle in the proximity of the fort, when an expedition leaves the fort to explore and scout the surrounding environment, they witness the ritual slaughter of a cow, recorded in the expedition’s Journal on the 10th September 1655:²²¹ “They slaughtered a beast in a way none of us had ever seen before. Having pulled it down to the ground with ropes, they cut it open from the side of the belly upwards, and while it was still alive they took

²²⁰ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 315.

²²¹ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 351, and recorded in the Company Journal on the 4th October 1655.

the intestines out and scooped out the blood with pots". The occasion is not clear, but could be a slaughtering for protection on the journey.²²²

Exploring the region, sending expeditions further and further afield is another sign that the Company is settling at the Cape. In May 1655 Van Riebeeck sends a "Despatch" dated the 28th April in which he makes the case for the establishment of "free burghers", Dutch settler-farmers, as a form of indentured labourers for the Company.²²³ The argument is framed by the theft of their cattle and the prospects of seizing the local peoples' cattle, which it is admitted here is not as easy as has been imagined in earlier Journal entries, for with "a garrison under 100 to 110 men that is hardly practicable without danger".²²⁴ Turning to what appears to be a secondary plan, given the difficulties with the primary plan in which large numbers of cattle are provided by the local people, Van Riebeeck indicates that those at the Cape had "frequently speculated" on the opportunity the Cape represented for settled farming, with "land enough for a thousand families".²²⁵ But, he goes on to write, we "were not aware that your Honors would be inclined to establish any colony here, otherwise we should have communicated to you our ideas on the subject; but we always supposed it to be your sole object to raise here sufficient refreshments for the shipping, and if possible to find out something to meet the expenses".²²⁶ "As, however, we now perceive [from letters received] that your Honors seem inclined to establish a colony, we shall proceed to express our opinions on that subject", which he then goes on to do. First, he confirms that "there is a fair prospect in several places here of growing corn and rearing live stock", and that "cultivation would succeed very well", although using the "Company's servants would be somewhat expensive". He also doubts "whether free families would be inclined to exert sufficient industry, as experience has shown that their chief aim is to fill their pockets quickly by setting up taverns, thus causing much drinking among the garrison, &c.". ²²⁷ In order "to establish free families here", he continues, "we must necessarily look out for means whereby they may, not merely maintain themselves, but lay by something also, without

222 Later on during this expedition "Hottentot women" are observed performing a ritual that is described to the Dutch in a way "implying that it is an offering to God", though much may be lost in translation; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 352.

223 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 311.

224 Moodie, *The Record*, 60.

225 See also Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 356.

226 Moodie, *The Record*, 61.

227 Moodie, *The Record*, 61–62.

hope of which no one will readily settle in a wild and desert country".²²⁸ Van Riebeeck then goes on to offer a detailed outline of the kinds of policies and procedures that might make the establishment of such free burghers practical and profitable.²²⁹ "In any event", he concludes, "it seems to us proper (under correction) that the Company should be the master in every way, and that the Colonists should not be at liberty to deal with any one except the Company, unless hereafter permitted".²³⁰

While not apposed to "Colonists", Van Riebeeck is careful to draw attention to the implications this will have for the profits of the Company. "[I]t seems to us", he argues, that "if families should come", that "the Company should cease farming, and leave that pursuit to the free Colonists, otherwise we cannot conceive what they would do with their produce"; furthermore, he adds, "to place them sooner on their legs, a good many slaves would be necessary for them . . . given out on credit until the settlers are in a condition to pay for them . . .".²³¹ He offers other suggestions about the kinds of person that should be recruited for this enterprise, but recommends rather that they "make a trail", beginning with "3 or 4 families" from among "your servants [at the Cape] to whom we have allowed private gardens, who would be well inclined to freedom, if they could have their wives with them, and we are of the opinion that those who are accustomed to the place, and acquainted with the country, would be the best to begin with", provided the Company acquires slaves "for the use" of these Colonists as well as the Company.²³²

While Van Riebeeck and the Company wait for a response to this proposal from the Lords' Seventeen, a proposal of nascent colonisation, the growing herd of Company cattle, "now 25 in number", 'mingles' with the cattle of the local people. Reflecting on this proximity, the Journal reflects yet again on how "their cattle and persons can be seized and held in the Company's power", with every day offering "ample opportunities for carrying it out". "Indeed", the Journal entry for 25–29 May 1655 documents, "there are times when they graze their cattle well within musket range, and occasionally their cattle mingle with ours". Immediately, however, the Journal imagines that this mingling of cattle is deliberate: "Quite obviously", it asserts, "they do this so as to get a chance of carrying off the Company's cattle once again—which, as we have said,

²²⁸ Moodie, *The Record*, 62.

²²⁹ Moodie, *The Record*, 62.

²³⁰ Moodie, *The Record*, 62.

²³¹ Moodie, *The Record*, 62.

²³² Moodie, *The Record*, 62.

mingle with theirs”.²³³ Unable to recognise the irony of their own imaginings, the Journal entry goes on to reassure its implied readers that, “Accordingly we are having them closely herded at all time by good, diligent soldiers, and at the same time the natives also see clearly enough that we have no inclination whatsoever to rob them of their cattle, but certainly to protect our own”.²³⁴ If bartering will not work because of the attachment African clans have towards their cattle and if seizing their cattle by force (though a fond fantasy) is not really feasible, then settlement is an option. But for now, bartering cattle remains the preferred option. So the Company keeps trying to make sense of the African reluctance to part with their cattle.

On another Sunday, a few days after the above entry, the Commander at the Cape, Van Riebeeck, has another opportunity to probe the significance of cattle for the indigenous peoples of the Cape. However, just as the indigenous peoples are reluctant to part with their cattle, except in the case of old or diseased beasts,²³⁵ so too they are reluctant to explain the significance of cattle to those who clearly inhabit a vastly different world-view in which cattle are simply a commodity to be traded and consumed. On the 3rd December 1655, nearly four years since they arrived at the Cape, “the Commander himself went to their camp”. What prompts the visit is the sight of the area around the fort “swarming with cattle and sheep, at a guess well over 20 thousand head”. “Yet”, the entry goes on to note, “from that vast multitude we could obtain no more than 3 young and old cows and 7 ditto sheep, in spite of the high prices offered and the good entertainment given the natives”. Finding a local African who had “learnt to speak a little Dutch”, they enquire of him “why these natives offered so few cattle for sale, in view of their desire for copper and, especially their liking for tobacco”. But the only information the interpreter is able to obtain (or communicate) is a repetition of what has been said since the arrival of the Company; the interpreter “gave us to understand that these folk were not anxious to part with their cattle, but that within a few days Harry would be coming along with other people and still more cattle of which we could get as many as we desired”.²³⁶

A definite answer is deflected and deferred. And similarly with their cattle. It is always others that would supply the cattle the Company craved. For each particular African people the Company encounters, their cattle are not a commodity to be traded. Precisely what place cattle inhabited among these

²³³ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 313.

²³⁴ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 313.

²³⁵ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 318.

²³⁶ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 372.

indigenous peoples is not now clear,²³⁷ for these peoples have been decimated, assimilated, and dispersed, precisely because their land and then their cattle were colonised and seized. Only fragments remain.²³⁸

The Local Bible: Religions of Extraction and Subsistence

The Company at the Cape continues to try to forge a formal trade agreement with the local peoples at the Cape, and while so doing also continues to plot on how they might “get” the local people and their cattle “all completely into our power”.²³⁹ On their part the local people confide in the Company that they did not know “whether we intended to settle here permanently or perchance depart at any moment”, but that they now recognise that “we are permanently settled”.²⁴⁰ And while trade agreements are brokered,²⁴¹ they are always broken, for the epistemological frame on which they are established is so vastly different for the respective parties to the ‘agreement’.

The Dutch continue to settle, with “houses that are now being built of brick”.²⁴² They are “instructed”, for the first time, directly by the Lords’ Seventeen, “to do our utmost to rear cattle”. Responding to the instructive letter, dated 16 April 1655, but only read in October 1655, the Council resolves and reports that:

Their Honours set great store by having an abundance of cattle here, particularly to serve as further refreshment for the passing ships in addition to the garden produce. It seems that we cannot at present get enough cattle by bartering with the natives to satisfy all our estimated requirements. In view of the above order we have therefore been obliged to concentrate on the breeding of cattle to a greater extent than hitherto.²⁴³

237 Though we do know more about the cattle cultures of the ‘Bantu’ peoples in the interior; see for example Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1991).

238 See Abrahams, “‘Take Me to Your Leaders’: A Critique of *Kraal and Castle*,” *Kronos: southern african histories* 22 (1995).

239 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 322, Moodie, *The Record*, 61, 67–69.

240 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 323.

241 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 324–325.

242 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 342.

243 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 346.

In the same Council resolution it is reported that the Company “now possesses about 80 head, but through the negligence of the herdsmen appointed by the Company, these animals have not been properly cared for, but on the contrary seriously neglected”. This prompts the Council to make the point that although “we have taken much trouble to encourage these people to do their duty, we find that . . . the ordinary labourers are quite content to do as little work as possible, knowing that they will in any case get their wages, etc.”. Following this logic, the Council goes on to argue that because, “[h]itherto it has clearly been impossible to teach them the necessary industry and application . . . another way will therefore have to be found, either by farming out the dairy cattle or by some other means, in the hope that when there is a personal interest, the breeding may succeed better because of the profits to be gained from it by the individual tenants”.²⁴⁴ “Furthermore”, the Council resolves and reports, “for the sake of the profit involved in this farming-out system, some tenants (and especially the married ones) could be all the more easily induced to remain here. . . . Thus the free families could be offered the means to self-advancement—a policy which the Hon. Company does seem to favour”.²⁴⁵ And, as was recommended to the Lords’ Seventeen, the Council now resolves to “experiment”—“outside the Company’s fortress”,²⁴⁶ subject to a long list of “conditions”, all of which are designed to represent the Company’s interests.²⁴⁷

While the Council is in favour of experimenting with the Company’s people, they do worry about the expense, recognising that slaves will be needed and that “a fairly good house would first have to be built there [beyond the boundaries of the fort], suitably defended, in order to protect the farmlands-to-be”. Acknowledging that this system of settlement “would be rather an expense for the Hon. Company”, this Journal entry continues to reflect, shifting its stance on the preferred kind of settlement, “it would be better to settle free families there”.²⁴⁸

As the Company’s cattle herd increases so too does contestation over grazing land. When African peoples from the interior move down towards the Cape pressure is put on the African peoples local to the Cape who in turn put pressure on the pastures used by the Company, who instructs them “that they would have to remain far enough from our land to prevent the pastures for our

²⁴⁴ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 346.

²⁴⁵ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 347.

²⁴⁶ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 347.

²⁴⁷ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 348–349.

²⁴⁸ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol I, 350.

cattle being consumed by their cattle, etc.”.²⁴⁹ Though colonisation ‘proper’ is a long way off yet, the Company has embarked on incremental forms of settlement and colonisation. The Company at the Cape is confident that they are “gaining a firm footing here and a thorough knowledge of the relations that exist between the different tribes here”.²⁵⁰ But both are more fragile than the Company imagines on 22nd of December 1655.

The next few years are devoted to devising ways of fencing off “this Cape”, whether with a canal or a hedge of thorns,²⁵¹ worrying about the shifting alliances in the trade wars of European empires,²⁵² as well as worrying how these shifts might affect the alliances the Dutch are attempting to form with the local African people,²⁵³ acquiring and retaining reluctant slaves,²⁵⁴ searching for suitable defensible land to extend cultivation,²⁵⁵ setting up policies for the leasing of the Company’s cattle and land to those the Company has chosen to grant their freedom,²⁵⁶ managing internal Company conflict and disputes,²⁵⁷ as well as managing trade and the trade related disputes between the emergent colonists and the local African people (as well as between colonists set on making a personal profit and visiting foreign ships),²⁵⁸ becoming embroiled in local African politics beyond their understanding,²⁵⁹ devising trade agreements with the local clans that cannot hold given the very different preconceptions about cattle,²⁶⁰ exploring and mapping the interior,²⁶¹ and above all increasingly levels of contestation with the local peoples who were not willing to give up their cattle or their land.²⁶²

249 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 367, see also 368–369, 373.

250 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol I*, 381.

251 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 9–11, 142; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol III*, 114–115, 185–186.

252 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 13, 25, 62, 105.

253 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 25.

254 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 15, 130, 140, 145, 219–220, 251, 265, 267–268, 272, 278, 279, 281, 285–286.

255 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 31, 32, 88, 128.

256 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 35, 90–92, 109.

257 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 61–62, 93, 142, 254.

258 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 100, 102, 126, 138, 261.

259 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 39–40, 154, 170–172, 297–300, 305, 311.

260 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 42–43, 49, 78, 137, 300–301.

261 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 188–190, 238, 244.

262 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 33, 38–39, 53, 89, 158, 276.

With respect to the last, the local African people asked “where they were to go should we build our houses there and cultivate the land”.²⁶³ A little to the interior, a similar point is made by other African peoples, but is misunderstood by the settler-explorers who “proceeded inland about 15 hours’ walk”: “They [the Africans] said that they had to live on their cattle, and called this place of exceptionally rich pasturage their Holland or Fatherland”.²⁶⁴ The implied threat is clear, as the Journal is sure to remember that Janz and Proot had made a similar point in their initial proposal, making it clear that it was only when the cattle and land of the local African peoples were threatened that they turned to violence, as would farmers in their own land.

The Irrupting Bible: Religion in an African Context

The practice of religion too continues, both formal and informal,²⁶⁵ including the regular routine of caring for the sick.²⁶⁶ However, religion irrupts at particular moments, particularly when the Company faces adversity. On the 26th June 1656, “As the Lord God is at present visiting us sorely with illness and disease among the men so that hardly anyone remains untouched, next Thursday [the 29th] has been appointed a day of general humiliation and prayer. This was announced to the men after evening prayers, and they were enjoined to occupy themselves on that day with religious exercises and prayer and to refrain from sin and shameful diversions, etc.”.²⁶⁷ Singled out for particular mention is that “some live so irreligiously that they take their meals like pigs without asking the Lord’s blessing before or returning thanks after the meals”.²⁶⁸ This mundane form of religious practice, the terrain of the sieketrooter, is viewed as a possible reason for God’s displeasure with the Company. We glean something of their theological outlook from this, indicating as it does a strong theology of retribution, as we have already noted.

263 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 89, an entry for the 20th February 1657; see also 135, 158.

264 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 123.

265 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 23, 27, 35–36, 43, 69, 70, 255, 258, 303.

266 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 30, 275.

267 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 43. A similar day is declared as “a day of fasting and prayer” on the 22nd May 1659 “that God would withhold from us the adversity with which He is so sorely afflicting us at present in the serious loss of livestock through disease, as well as the thefts, robberies and murders committed by these barbarous people”; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol III*, 50–51.

268 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 43.

A second of religion's irruptions is the establishment, on the 17th April 1658, of "a school for the Company's male and female slaves". The task is assigned specifically to the new sieketrooster, Pieter van der Stael, who "has been entrusted with the task of giving them instruction in the morning and afternoon, besides his duties of visiting the sick, particularly because he reads Dutch well and correctly". The entry goes on to add that, "To encourage the slaves to attend and to hear or learn the Christian prayers, it is ordered that after school everyone is to receive a small glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco". "All of this is to be done in the presence of the Commander", the entry asserts, "who will attend for a few days to put everything in proper order and subject these people to proper discipline, signs of which are already apparent". The logic is clear, as the entry goes on to elucidate, education in the Dutch language and religious instruction are so that "they may as soon as possible be of service to the settlement".²⁶⁹ And when they resist such service, they are hunted, captured, and "cast in to chains", "praise be to God".²⁷⁰

A third example of religion's irruption is around the person of "Eva", a product of the sieketrooster's work. "Eva" acts as a translator, and so becomes gradually more visible, as "a certain girl, aged 15 or 16, and by us called Eva [though her name is Krotoa],²⁷¹ who has been in the service of the Commander's wife from the beginning and is now living here permanently and is beginning to learn to speak Dutch well".²⁷² She has almost certainly been a pupil of the sieketrooster, of both Wijlant and his successor Pieter van der Stael, for she has learned to speak Dutch and, we will note, has become familiar with aspects of the Reformed Christian faith.²⁷³ The description of the kind of instruction expected of the sieketrooster towards the Company's slaves, gives some indication of what "Eva" has undergone in the service of the Commander's house.

As an African insider to the life of the Company, Eva is never fully trusted. The Company fears that she is using her access to advocate for her own people, "as [the biblical] Esther did for Mordecai",²⁷⁴ and so invoking a biblical analogy, but strangely one that implies that God might be on "Eva's" side! They are also distressed by "Eva's" putting on and putting off of European clothing and African clothing as she moves from the Commander's house to her own

269 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 259; see also Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 29–35.

270 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 124.

271 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 26, see also 4.

272 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 170.

273 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 26–28.

274 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 340.

people, shifting from “clothes” to “hides”, but promising “in the meantime not to forget the Lord God, Whom she had learnt to know in the Commander’s house; she would always think of Him and endeavour to learn, etc.”.²⁷⁵ She is also described as someone who “had learnt our language and also partly our religion, etc.”.²⁷⁶ Part of the religion she seems to have learnt, according to the Journal, is “how to pray to our blessed Lord”, which she taught her sister to do on her visit to her sister’s people. The context of her prayer, praying as she had “night and day, when she was not sleepy or asleep” was for healing for her sister who had been very ill; and she had prayed “until her sister had recovered”.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, the Journal entry continues, “She had thereupon instructed her sister how God was to be thanked for her recovery. This was very pleasing to the natives, who were desirous of further instruction”.²⁷⁸ Healing from sickness is clearly a shared concern among the Company and the peoples at the Cape. However, the Company does not follow up on this desire for further instruction; instead, they use this connection “Eva” has made as the basis for sending “a large expedition” to her sister’s people in order to establish a trade alliance, bypassing the peoples most local to the Cape in the hope of “obtaining more cattle for the Hon. Company by means of barter”.²⁷⁹ The Company’s prayer is not for the spread of their religion, but for the spread of their trade: “We trust that the Lord God may be pleased to enable us to obtain a large number of cattle for the merchandise”.²⁸⁰ The spread of their trade, not their religion, is the primary concern. Or, more precisely, the spread of their trade is the spread of their religion.

When “Eva” returns to the Company’s small territory, on the 30th December 1658, having remained with her sister’s people at the end of the third of the Company’s trade expeditions in early November, which she had accompanied as an interpreter, she is reported to have said that she wanted “to stay here for some time to learn more of our religion, on the suggestion and at the request of her brother-in-law, her sister and other people . . . [who] had, according to her, learned so much through her that they could feel in their hearts that what she had told them of God and His service was true”. Furthermore, the Journal entry reports that the local chief “had therefore caused instruction to be given to many children by Eva, who taught them to pray and give thanks to the Lord,

275 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 343, see also 373.

276 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 363.

277 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 363–364.

278 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 364.

279 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 364–373.

280 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 368.

before and after eating, on lying down to sleep and on rising”.²⁸¹ From this description it would appear that Eva passes on what she has learned from the sieketrooster. There is no indication, in this report, of the Bible’s presence in “Eva’s” formation, though she must have heard it read.

The Journal goes on, however, to insist that “Eva’s” sister’s people “were beginning to understand that it was about God that she spoke, etc.”, and that “they would bring little children with them to be left here to be instructed”. “For this purpose”, the entry continues, “9 men had accompanied Eva and had at their request been allowed to attend evening prayers”.²⁸² And the next morning, the 1st January 1659, this group of Africans “attended the service. When it was explained to them what was being taught there”.²⁸³ So both this African trade delegation and “Eva” must have been exposed to hearing the Bible being read, but what they might have made of it is not evident.

When her sister’s people leave a few days later, “Eva” remains at the fort, “to learn further how to read and pray, etc.”.²⁸⁴ So Eva may have been able to read the Bible for herself, though it not clear that she would have been permitted to engage with the Bible in an unmediated manner, given that even the sieket-rooster was not permitted so to do.

In June 1659, when an envoy from “Eva’s” sister’s people comes to the fort, amidst a period of increasing tension and violence between the Company and local clans, and proposes forming an alliance with the Company, the Company responds with the religious language of retribution:

We said ‘Yes’ [to the proposed alliance], and to make them even better disposed we declared that we dared no longer delay destroying them [the local clans], for our Heavenly Father (whom Eva was learning to know, but about whom the robbers [from the local clan] were totally ignorant and had no desire to learn) would punish us, since the blood of His people, which these villains had so murderously shed, cried out to Him for vengeance. Hence we were in duty bound to apply ourselves so thoroughly to this task as to hunt them down without ceasing.²⁸⁵

The reference to ‘the blood crying out for vengeance’ is almost certainly a biblical allusion, possibly to Genesis 4:10, where God confronts Cain, who has mur-

281 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 406.

282 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 406.

283 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 1.

284 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 1.

285 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 73.

dered his brother, saying, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground” (NAS). Whether Eva and the other Africans recognise this allusion is not clear, but they would certainly have understood the overarching theology of retribution within which the speech is framed, for in its zeal to formalise a trading alliance with this particular African people who reside a little further away, they divulge their until now ‘hidden’ transcript of retribution towards the local African clan. What was kept sequestered in the Journal now erupts into the public (African) realm.

When reflecting on their trade alliance with “Eva’s” sister’s people, the Company offers a theological rationale for why they have entered into this alliance, writing: “Such an alliance would also find the most favour in the sight of the Lord God, particularly with people who have always been well known as discreet and from whom the Hon. Company has regularly obtained most of its livestock by means of friendly barter”.²⁸⁶ A number of days later, as something of an afterthought, the Company adds that there is another reason for establishing this alliance. “There is also, it seems, a better prospect of propagating the word of God amongst these people in the course of time, since the foundation of religious knowledge have been laid in Eva, and by means of her are already being spread and imparted from time to time among her people”.²⁸⁷ Again, trade is the primary purpose, with religion something of a secondary afterthought, justifying the primary goal.

This irruption of forms of Christian Reformed Religion around the person of “Eva” takes place in the wider context of the Company’s struggle to maintain and sustain its place at the Cape. The alliance with “Eva’s” sister’s people is one of the few apparently positive signs for the Company in an increasingly hostile environment. And even then, when “Eva” chooses to accompany her sister’s people as they leave the fort on the 26th June 1658, this “excited the suspicions of some of our people” who worry about this African who comes and goes so freely between the European and Africa worlds.²⁸⁸ But the Company “could not see our way clear to retaining her here against her will, for if we did we should be unable to profit fully from her services”.²⁸⁹

286 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 75.

287 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 80.

288 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 82.

289 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 82. It is increasingly clear too that the Company does not trust “Eva’s” sister’s peoples; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 86, 88, 90, 91–94.

“Eva” does return to the fort, amid deepening Dutch suspicions of alliances among the local peoples, including “Eva’s” sister’s people.²⁹⁰ And when she next departs the fort, having given the Company the impression that a formal trade alliance had been formed with “Eva’s” sister’s people but that the local clans would attempt to disrupt this alliance, she utters a prophecy, in Dutch, saying, “Mijnheer Van Riebeeck, take good care! I shall not return for a long time. Vigorous warfare will spread throughout your country.”²⁹¹

“Eva” is right, for the regular “skirmishes” that have been taking place, with local clans attacking the Company’s people and attempting to take their cattle, escalate. Doman (named Anthony by the Company), a local African and a partial product, like “Eva” (whose name is Krotoa, but who is never referred to by this name in the Journal) (and “Harry”, who we eventually learn is actually Autshumao),²⁹² of European and Company engagement, having spent time in the Company’s service in Batavia, boasts, a few days after “Eva’s” pronouncement, that his people are able to plunder the trading resources of the Company, sack the fort, and then “could also prevent the people on the ships from landing”.²⁹³ And this is where the third example of religion’s irruption is found, within the fears of the Company as they contemplate the failure of their project at the Cape.

On this occasion, having heard of the ‘boasts’ of Doman and his people, the Company writes, on the 8th July 1659: “It is thus apparent what little prospect there is of peace in the present circumstances; nay rather, there is every prospect of war, in which case may the Almighty bless the Hon. Company with His aid and come to its assistance to protect our handful of people against the many brutal savages of this country”.²⁹⁴

Prior to this, Doman, whom the Company considers “a rascal”, who “tries to thwart the Hon. Company in everything and is thrice as bad and harmful as Harry ever was throughout his life”,²⁹⁵ had given up his role as interpreter for the Company and taken up the role of leader of his local people in resis-

290 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 89–100.

291 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 94. For more of “Eva” see Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 133–134, 161–163, 174, 176–177, 205, 215, 238, 247, 252, 259–261, 264–266, 269–271, 274–278, 280, 303, 308, 331, 388, 443; Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 26–28; Wells, “Eva’s Men: Gender and Power in the Establishment of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–74,” *Journal of African History* 39, no. 3 (1998); Landman, “The Religious Krotoa (C1642–1674),” *Kronos: southern african histories* 23 (1996).

292 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 306.

293 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 95.

294 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 95.

295 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 328.

tance to the Company's occupation of the Cape,²⁹⁶ targeting in particular the Company's cattle.²⁹⁷ This provokes the Company not only to take up arms against Doman and his people, but also to declare a special day "of fasting and prayer", "that God would withhold from us the adversity with which He is so sorely afflicting us at present in the serious loss of livestock through disease, as well as the thefts, robberies and murders committed by these barbarous people", "granting us His aid and blessing in these times of danger and trouble".²⁹⁸ In addition, the Company resolves to institute a regular "service of intercession and prayer" to be held "every Wednesday afternoon at 4 o'clock, so that by prayers and supplication we may avert the wrath of God from us: that He may be pleased in His power to vouchsafe us His blessing and assistance against our said enemies, that we may gain and keep the upper hand and may restore peace and friendly relations with them". Again, there is a strong sense of a theology of retribution, with the resolution beginning as follows: "For our trespass the Lord God has recently seen fit to visit us with punishments such as deaths among the Company's livestock, in addition to thefts of the burghers' cattle, war and murders committed by the barbarous people of this country, disasters which have come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, to the great loss and distress of the burghers and to the complete ruin of some of the farmers". The resolution goes on to argue in mitigation, stating that, "We have nevertheless so far always been most desirous of living in friendship and having cordial relations with these people. Since, however, this has proved to be of no avail, and we have been forced to take up arms to oppose their wilfulness—which has grown no less—it has been decided that in the future a service of intercession and prayers shall be held. . .".²⁹⁹ This "intimation" is made "before the congregation" and "after the Sunday sermon",³⁰⁰ summoning the entire congregation to fasting and prayer.

The Company considers itself like the biblical Job, for the "Lord God has thus seen fit to visit us for some time on all sides. Like Job, we trust that we shall soon find favour in His sight once more. Amen".³⁰¹

And God is invoked again as the Company's army leaves the fort on the 13th July 1659 and "began their march in the name of the Lord towards our

296 Doman is adamant that "the land of the Cape" 'belonged' to the local clans, and to them only; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol II, 295.

297 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 63.

298 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 50–52.

299 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 64.

300 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 64.

301 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 72.

enemies' camps. May the Almighty bless them with victory and grant that they may return home in good health. Amen".³⁰² And when some of the expedition returns, being unable to go further, thus weakening "our expedition somewhat", the Journal perseveres, writing (and praying), "though with God's help we hope that when we can locate and engage our enemy we may yet be successful with His omnipotent assistance".³⁰³

A few days later there is yet "another skirmish", as five of Doman's people "fell upon a soldier who was driving 2 oxen from the Company's granary to the fort, and after hurling assegais at him, which pierced his clothes, they had withdrawn and made off with the cattle". Later they are "intercepted and surrounded" and in the ensuing gunfire two of the five are killed, one is captured, and Doman is wounded but escapes. The captured man,

who was one of the Caepmans [another name used for the most local of African peoples], and spoke tolerable Dutch, being asked why they did us this injury, declared that it was for no other reason than because they saw that we were breaking up the best land and grass, where their cattle were accustomed to graze, trying to establish ourselves every where, with houses and farms, as if we were never more to remove, but designed to take, for our permanent occupation, more and more of this Cape country, which had belonged to them from time immemorial. Aye! so that their cattle could not get at the water without passing over the corn land, which we would not allow them to do; that they consequently resolved (as it was their land) to dishearten us, by taking away the cattle, (with which they could see that we broke up and destroyed the best land;) and if that would not produce the effect—by burning our houses and corn, until we were all forced to go away:—that Doman had also put it into their heads, that after all the houses in the country were destroyed, the Fort could be easily surprised—as the earth walls were built with a slope—and thus the Dutch might be forced quite to abandon the country, &c.³⁰⁴

302 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 99.

303 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 99.

304 Moodie, *The Record*, 186, see also 206–207. See also Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, Vol III, 101, 195–196, 214–215, 442–443. Here are further examples of Africans speaking for themselves, explaining their connections to this land and these cattle. In responding to these claims, the Company is unable to deny them and abandons any attempt to invoke God. Instead, they assert: "Their land had thus justly fallen to us in a defensive war, won by the sword, as it were, and we intended to keep it"; Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*,

To this eloquent argument the Company responds, in this “Despatch from Commander Van Riebeeck and Council to the Governor General and Council, Batavia”, dated 29 July 1659, “but of this, with God’s help, there is no fear”.³⁰⁵ But fear the Company does, never knowing with any certainty “who are friends, and who foes”,³⁰⁶ worrying too that the slaves they have bought will share what they know of European warfare from other locations with the Africans local to the Cape.³⁰⁷ There are even indications of a nascent ‘class’ war, for there is an intriguing reference to an inter-ethnic insurrection against the Company, consisting of “4 English, 4 Scotch and 3 Dutch servants of the Company as well as a black convict, and 2 servants of free burghers”, who together “with 15 slaves . . . had plotted to kill first the men . . . working in the forest, then the people at the Company’s granary and finally to scale the walls of the fort and murder everybody within, to the smallest child. After this they were to sail out to the yacht Erasmus in the Company’s or the free burghers’ vessels, seize the ship and sail away. But the Almighty be thanked, who has thus far been pleased to avert so dastardly and murderous attack”.³⁰⁸ Things are far from settled.

This, “the Hottentot war”,³⁰⁹ would be the first of many forms of resistance to covetous and colonial European settlement. And European forms of religion would regularly be used to justify occupation, conquest, and colonisation.³¹⁰ Quite what role the Bible plays in the religion of these trader-settlers is not clear. And how “Eva” and the other indigenous peoples of this period, including African slaves from other parts of the continent, used what they learned of the Company’s religion is also not clear. Though it is perhaps not incidental that it is an African woman who engages most substantially, though ‘partially’ with this religion (and perhaps the Bible). African appropriations of the European brought Bible and religion would become much clearer in the years that were to come, both before and after colonialism (proper) had exerted its grip on African cattle, land, minerals, and labour.

Vol III, 196. In a later “Despatch from Commander Van Riebeeck and Council to Chamber XVII”, dated 4 May 1660, the claims of the local African people are reiterated, and again it is asserted that “we were not inclined to restore it [their land], as it has now become the property of the Company by the sword and the laws of war”; Moodie, *The Record*, 206.

305 Moodie, *The Record*, 186, Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 199.

306 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 88.

307 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 121.

308 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 164.

309 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 158.

310 Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck*, *Vol III*, 199.

What is clear is that the Bible did not change hands at the Cape. Indeed, the Bible was not even that evident in European hands, being carefully circumscribed by various forms of formal religion and popular religion. The Bible would emerge from the forms of Christianity present at the Cape and assert its own iconic and narrative identity, but that would take some time. In the next chapter we leave “the infant colony” at the Cape,³¹¹ and follow a more discernible Bible as it makes its way beyond the emerging Cape colony into the African controlled interior.

³¹¹ Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck, Vol II*, 348.

The Revealed Bible

The bible being on the table gave occasion to explain the nature and use of a book, particularly of that book—how it informed us of God, who made all things; and of the beginning of all things, which seemed to astonish her, and many a look was directed towards the bible.¹

This chapter follows the Bible as it leaves the Colony and makes its way into ‘the interior’, following the well worn but difficult trails trod by countless Africans,² and later by European traders, explorers, and missionaries. Though still associated with trade, as we will see, this is a quite different Bible from the constrained, embargoed Bible of the Dutch East India Company. This Bible is common property among the Europeans who travel into the interior.

Crucial to the encounters with the Bible that take place during this period among the Southern Tswana is the recognition that Africans are in control. While the Colony in the late 1700s and early 1800s is showing marked signs of emergent forms of ‘colonialism’, the African interior is securely in the control, in every way, of Africans. This ‘pre-colonial’ moment, with ‘colonialism’ emerging in the Colony close by, is under theorised. Yet such is the reality into which the Bible comes when it is brought among the BaTlhaping people of the interior.

The Bartered Bible: Trader-missionary Travellers

Among the first Bible bearing Europeans to make their way among the BaTlhaping people of the African interior are Jan Matthys Kok and William Edwards, who sojourned in the vicinity of the BaTlhaping community from 1801–1806. With tenuous links to the Suid-Afrikaanse Sendinggenootskap (SASG), who looked after the interests of the London Missionary Society in South Africa, both Kok and Edwards attempted to do mission work among

1 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1815), 199.

2 There are indications that the indigenous peoples of the Cape had links with the Southern Tswana, referring to them as “Briquas”; du Bruyn, “Die Tlhaping En Die Eerste Sendelinge, 1801–1806,” *South African Historical Journal* 14 (1982): 8.

the BaTlhaping. The array of literature that came to constitute the missionary record is replete with evidence of their failure to make much headway in getting the BaTlhaping, then under the leadership of Chief Molehabangwe, to receive their proclamation of Christianity. The obstacles they faced and the impact they may have had are well documented,³ as are the brief sojourns of three other missionaries who worked with Kok and Edwards, Aart Anthonie van der Lingen, Willem Koster and Lambert Jansz. Much of this record is focussed on missionary Christianity. This chapter, however, focuses on the (missionary) Bible.

In November 1802 Kok, together with three BaTlhaping men, journeyed to the Cape Colony in order to appear before the directors of the SASG to report on his progress among the BaTlhaping. Kok claimed that after a discussion on matters to do with Christianity with Chief Molehabangwe that he, the Chief of the BaTlhaping, had declared his readiness to come and live with Kok.⁴ Impressed by Kok's report, the directors sent a letter with Kok to Molehabangwe—and a Bible. There is no record of how Molehabangwe responded to this letter or the gift of a Bible. However, we can speculate that Molehabangwe would probably have been more interested in the reports of the three BaTlhaping who accompanied Kok concerning the Cape Colony and settlers who controlled it, using their information in order to navigate potential lines of trade and alliance with the Colony.⁵ What he would have made of the Bible as a distinct object is unclear. The items 'Colony', 'missionary', 'letter', and 'Bible' could have been variously collocated, as the record reflects, particularly if we take into account African perspectives, for the record does offer signs of BaTlhaping collocations. What is clear is that this earliest series of encounters between missionaries and the BaTlhaping was characterised by trade. All commentators, including the BaTlhaping, are in agreement that Kok and Edwards were first and foremost traders. To some extent this was all they were permitted to be by the BaTlhaping.

Missionaries were an important part of the great chain of trade which linked the BaTlhaping to the Colony, its goods, and the world beyond. Indeed, the missionary John Campbell, who came among the BaTlhaping when

3 du Bruyn, "Die Tlhaping En Die Eerste Sendelinge, 1801–1806; du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Die Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825* (Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1989); du Bruyn and Southey, "The Treatment of Christianity and Protestant Missionaries in South African Historiography," in *Missions and Christianity in South African History* (eds. Bredekamp and Ross; Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).

4 du Bruyn, "Die Tlhaping En Die Eerste Sendelinge, 1801–1806," 20.

5 du Bruyn, "Die Tlhaping En Die Eerste Sendelinge, 1801–1806," 20.

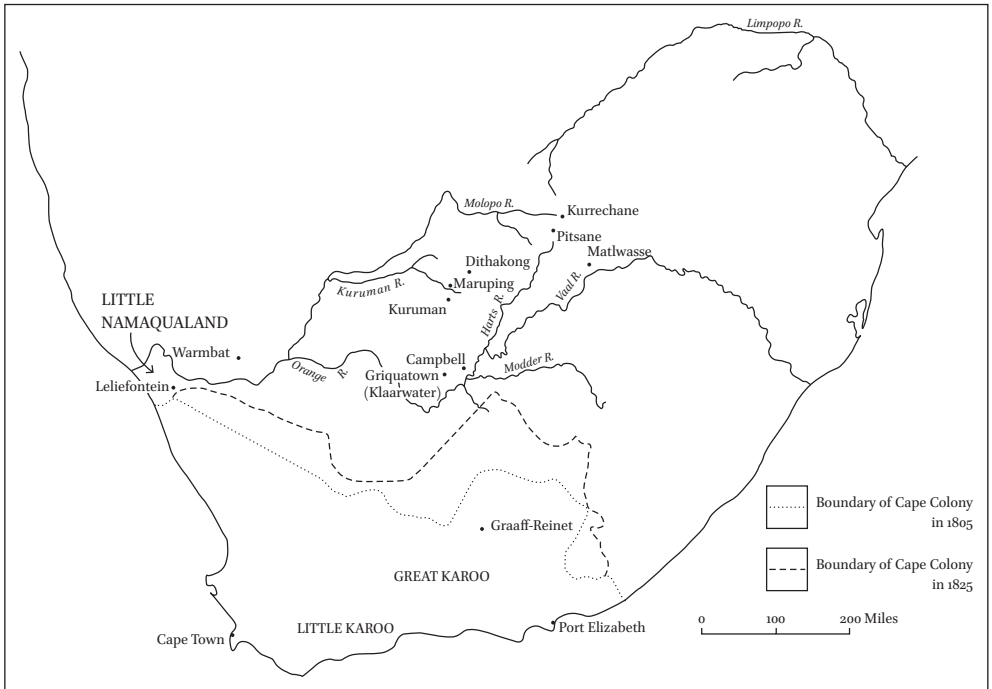


FIGURE 2 *The Colony and the Interior.*

Molehabangwe's son, Mothibi, had succeeded him as chief, worries that missionaries are perceived by the BaThlaping to be traders. In a letter Campbell reflects on Mothibi's comment to him "that whenever the missionaries have got enough they shall be at liberty to depart"; Campbell worries that Mothibi is here "still supposing trade a part of their [the missionaries'] object". "[H]e cannot indeed", continues Campbell, "yet think otherwise from the example of Kok and Edwards at the Krooman River . . .".⁶ Campbell's protestations aside, Kok and Edwards represented an important aspect of the missionaries' role in South Africa.

But trader-missionaries and missionary-traders were not the only kind of Bible bearing Europeans to come among the BaThlaping. Africa and Africans beyond the frontiers of the Colony were of interest to many, specifically

6 J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D]. Here and in the following CWM is the Council for World Mission, whose papers are housed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

intellectuals,⁷ civil servants,⁸ and explorers. The English explorer, traveller, naturalist, and artist, William Burchell is a good example, particularly because among his possessions is a Bible. A few years after Chief Molehabangwe had been presented with a Bible, Burchell visits the BaTlhaping, following the path of pilgrimage to those Africans who reside beyond the boundaries of the Colony. With Burchell's visit the link between the Bible and the letter will become clearer, as will the link between the Bible and the gun, and the Bible and power. Was the Bible simply one more object of trade, or was it a different kind of object, with its own strange power? Burchell's stay, to which we now turn, will certainly have something to say in contributing to and in clarifying emerging constellations of Bible-related significations.

The Covered Bible: Burchell's Visit

Someone who had no formal commitment to Christian mission, but who did bring a Bible among the BaTlhaping, is the explorer William Burchell. Intrepid explorer that he was, his wagons rolled into Dithakong, Chief Mothibi's place, on 13th July 1812. John Campbell, it is worth noting, for we will come to his narrative in due course, was slowly making his way around the mission stations in the Colony during this time, and would only arrive in Dithakong a year later. In some sense, then, Burchell prepared the way for Campbell; and, I will argue, the manner in which his Bible was presented and perceived may provide useful clues to the reception of Campbell's Bible during his later, more sustained stay.

Burchell's ostensible purpose for being there, as he communicates it to Chief Mothibi, Molehabangwe's son,⁹ is quite different from the missionaries. The object of his visit, he says,

was to form an acquaintance with him [Mothibi] and his people, whom I had heard so favorably spoken of at *Kárrikammā* (Klaarwater): that so much had been said in praise of Litakun [Dithakong], that I had been

7 Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806* (trans. Plumpton; London: Henry Colburn, 1812).

8 Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798* (2 vols.; London: Cadell & Davies, 1806); Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1806).

9 Molehabangwe died in March 1812. For a summary overview of the BaTlhaping's social location see the "Introduction" by I. Schapera in Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, xv–xxix.

very desirous of seeing his town; that I wished at the same time to hunt the wild animals, that I might be enabled to take home the skins of them to my own country; that I intended to stop with the Bachäp̄ins long enough to learn their language, so that I might be able to tell them myself many things which I wished them to know, and that we might by these means understand each other's sentiments more clearly than they could be explained through an interpreter: and that I hoped we should thus become true friends, that I might at my return home, report of the Bachapins [sic] that they were a good people, and that on hearing this, other white-men would visit him and bring abundance of beads and tobacco.¹⁰

Burchell then asked Mothibi “whether he thought that what I had said, was good; and whether he approved of my remaining a long time at Litakun”.¹¹ Avoiding commenting on the substance of Burchell's speech, Mothibi indicates through the interpreter that, “I was at liberty to stay as long as it pleased me, or to depart whenever I chose”.¹²

As it turns out, Burchell stayed not quite a month, leaving Dithakong on the 3rd August 1812, hardly enough time to learn the local language and converse in an unmediated manner. But Burchell did cram an awful lot into his three weeks, and his journal, the primary source for this analysis, is extensive and full of all sorts of observations. My interest, however, is less in his observations, instructive as they are in what they tell of the European gaze, and more in trying to interpret what meanings Burchell and his goods of strange power, particularly the Bible, may have acquired in the eyes of the BaTlhaping.

Burchell notes, repeatedly, that the BaTlhaping are observing him. Following the “interview” with Mothibi recounted briefly above, Burchell goes on to record that, “The surrounding multitude were in the highest degree attentive to all we said; the eyes of every individual were fixed upon me, and examined me with utmost curiosity”.¹³ Later, having been gazed on at length by a “curious good-humoured crowd”, he records that Mothibi and others from the BaTlhaping leadership come to his wagon with “no other object than that of mere curiosity”.¹⁴

10 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (vol. 2; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), 365. These shifts of point of view within a sentence here and elsewhere are deliberate, a reminder of the multiple levels of representation present.

11 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 365.

12 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 366.

13 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 366.

14 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 369.

It is during this visit to his wagon that the first significant encounter with writing and text takes place. Burchell's Bible is not as prominent as Campbell's would be and not as embargoed as Van Riebeeck's, but in his visit we already see something of an association being formed between 'writing', 'book', and 'Bible'. On this particular visit to his wagon Burchell takes out his vocabulary list and reads various sentences to them in their own language, sentences which he has gathered from his guide and interpreter "Muchunka".¹⁵ Though they are both amused and pleased by his efforts, Burchell is surprised by how quickly they have become accustomed to "the nature and use of books and writing, as several white-persons, had at different times, visited their country".¹⁶

However, what really interested Mothibi and his advisers at this point was not books and writing but the gun. This becomes clear later the same day, when Burchell recognises that much of what has transpired in his conversations with Mothibi has been a prelude, "an introduction to another more *important subject* which it seems, had occupied their thoughts long before my arrival, and had been a matter of national consultation"—namely, the procurement of guns.¹⁷ In fact, the whole of Burchell's visit is dominated by Mothibi's determination to get a gun from Burchell, and despite being bested, Burchell tells this story with a real feel for the intricacies and urgency of the acquisition. For, finally, Mothibi succeeds, outmanoeuvring Burchell and obtaining a gun.¹⁸

But the Bible, not the gun, is our concern, notwithstanding that the gun and the Bible are closely associated, even collocated, as we will see, in indigenous apprehensions of missionaries. And while Burchell is watched and studied for how a gun may be prised from his grasp, other things, including the Bible, will have been noticed and become cause for reflection. It was not only Burchell who "beheld every where, a harvest of new ideas"; and while Burchell lamented that he "was working alone in so extensive a field [of new ideas], . . . where so many eyes were wanted to observe, and so many hands to record",¹⁹ the BaTlhaping did not have this limitation. They had plenty enough eyes and hands.

15 The role of indigenous agents like "Muchunka" were clearly central to indigenous understandings of travellers like Burchell and missionaries like Campbell. He could talk directly to the BaTlhaping, and they would have used him as a constant guide to what they were encountering.

16 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 369–370.

17 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 367.

18 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 376–405.

19 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 379.

The next day, only his second in Dithakong, Burchell again takes up text, this time in the form of writing rather than reading. The situation in which he does so is worth recording in some detail, signifying as it does potentially important aspects of text. Seated in the front part of his wagon, Burchell has a constant stream of visitors who sit beside him, “indulging their *inquisitiveness* in examining with their eyes every thing within my sitting-place”. Burchell is tolerant of this, recognising that his two wagons are “loaded with goods of the most extraordinary kind”.²⁰ But ever the giver as well as the gatherer of information, as are most European travellers, Burchell decides to “amuse them” by taking out his journal “to record a few facts and occurrences as they passed”. “Whenever I wrote”, he writes, “the spectators watched the motion of my hand with great attentiveness, and several of them evidently comprehended the nature and intention of what I was doing”.²¹ Writing, it would seem, was of interest to the BaTlhaping.

Writing, it would also seem, pointed to concealment, for what really held the attention of the attendant BaTlhaping was literally what lay behind the writing. They were intrigued, Burchell tells us, about “what was concealed behind the canvas partition which parted off the sleeping-place from that end of the waggon at which we were sitting; and although it was explained to them that it was the place where I slept, and that there was nothing in it but my bedding, they would hardly believe me till some of them had taken a peep behind the curtain”.²² The BaTlhaping probing was obviously well founded, for, as Burchell goes on to admit, he did keep certain things hidden. There are even indications, as we will see, that writing prompted the BaTlhaping to probe behind the curtain.

That writing and secrecy may have been associated in the perceptions of the BaTlhaping is suggested by Burchell's narrative at this point, for he states (condescendingly) that, “When they had seen enough of writing to give them as clear a notion of it as they were capable of, several, and more particularly Mollemmi, became very desirous of knowing what was concealed behind the canvas partition which parted off the sleeping-place from that end of the waggon at which we were sitting”.²³ Realising that his concealed space behind the canvas curtain “would be examined”, Burchell admits that he “had taken care at night to put into the chests upon which my bedding lay, every thing which they were likely to covet, or which might excite particular attention”. On this

20 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 390.

21 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 391.

22 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 391.

23 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 391.

occasion, then, “Little therefore was visible but such objects as were familiar, or well-known, to them; unless it was some few articles of which I could not avoid making open use”. Unable to resist addressing his implied readers explicitly, Burchell goes on immediately to comment:

Similar *precautions* are of the highest importance to a European traveller in these countries; but they require at the same time, to be so managed as not to excite any suspicion of concealment; as such suspicion might in some cases be more dangerous than an open exposure of every thing; because, when once raised, it generally leads the natives to imagine more riches to be concealed, than there are in reality.²⁴

So what objects did Burchell conceal in his chests behind the canvas partition in his wagon? Watches, optical, mathematical, and astronomical instruments, like the telescope, sextant and thermometer seem to have been the objects Burchell was concerned to conceal,²⁵ because, he says on a number of occasions in his narrative, “the glittering appearance of which might excite in savages the desire of possessing them.”²⁶ In an entry recorded the day after he allows the BaTlhaping to inspect his partitioned place, Burchell reveals something else that was hidden here, not so much an object as an activity: journal writing.

It was only by *a stratagem* that time could be found for writing my *journal*;—I ordered my people to keep all strangers away from my waggon, by telling them that I had been much fatigued, and that, until I made my appearance in public and the waggon was thrown open, they were always to suppose that I was then asleep and must not be disturbed. In the mean time, I was busily employed in writing in my sleeping-place, the only part where I could keep myself undiscovered.²⁷

But, as Burchell himself acknowledges, “Mattivi [Mothibi] and several of the chieftains were cunning enough to suspect that it might be only a trick to keep myself alone; and they therefore, as they walked by the end of the waggon,

24 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 391.

25 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 496, 498–499, 509.

26 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (vol. 1: London (Reprint, Cape Town): Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green (Reprint, C. Struik), 1824), 577; Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 498–499.

27 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 401.

peeped in to ascertain the truth”.²⁸ The truth was, of course, that Burchell was in there writing, but, he maintains, “when they saw that I was not in my sitting-room, they concluded that I was still really asleep, especially as I took the utmost care not to make the least noise, nor by any movement, to cause the waggon to shake”.²⁹ Were Mothibi and his men so easily fooled? Probably not, for the constant surveillance of the BaTlhaping missed very little. Only the day before, Burchell had recorded in his journal how difficult it was to conceal objects and actions from the BaTlhaping.³⁰

Why would Burchell, from the perspective of the BaTlhaping, openly read from his writings,³¹ ostentatiously and publicly write in his journal,³² but also hide in the back of his wagon in order to spend long hours writing? Were there perhaps different kinds of writing and different kinds of books? Were some forms of writing and some books more powerful than others and therefore purposefully concealed and controlled? These and other related questions may have occupied BaTlhaping recollections, and if they had they would have laid some sort of foundation for Campbell and the later missionaries he sent to settle (eventually) among them, for whom one book, the Bible, was particularly important.

But what of Burchell's Bible, for he definitely had one? The occasion for the Bible's appearance and its use are of enormous importance, establishing as they do the web of ideas to which Burchell's Bible belonged. Van Roye, one of Burchell's hired “Hottentots”, had consistently shown disrespect and open defiance to Burchell, refusing to obey legitimate orders. “It became therefore unavoidable, to take serious notice of his conduct; and I immediately ordered all my men to be present at the waggons, and declared that it was now my intention to punish his disobedience; but that I would first hear, in the presence of all, what he had to say in his defence”.³³

Among those present, besides Burchell's immediate party, were “Mattivi³⁴ and his chieftains, whose whole attention was fixed on us”. Observing carefully what was to take place, Mothibi and the other BaTlhaping leadership “were sitting at a little distance: not a word was spoken by any one; nor was the least

28 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 401.

29 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 401–402.

30 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 385.

31 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 369.

32 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 391.

33 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 468.

34 Burchell alters his transcription of this name here; he is clearly adjusting his orthography as he hears more clearly the indigenous pronunciation.

sound to be heard in the mootsi. Neither the Chief, nor any of the natives, attempted to interfere with these transactions; nor did they make the smallest remark: all were serious and still”.³⁵ Mixing his own and local indigenous signs, and thereby forging novel connections of ideas, Burchell conducts a formal trial of Van Roye at the wagons in Mothibi’s “mootsi” (ward). Having laid out his pistols and sword on the chest in his wagon—more signs for the BaTlhaping to conjure with³⁶—“to impress more strongly on my people the serious nature of the affair”,³⁷ he then “produced a Dutch Testament, and as Van Roye could read tolerably well, I bade him take notice what book it was”.³⁸ “With some formality”, Burchell uses the Bible in order to administer “the usual *oath* to relate the truth”. However, the prevarications of Van Roye push him to expound on the oath-taking ritual just enacted:

Seeing this, I admonished him of the dreadful crime which he would commit by uttering a falsity at the moment when he called God to witness his veracity: I explained to him in the most solemn and impressive manner, the respect which he as a Christian ought to show to that book; and that it was better he should at once condemn himself by confessing his fault in the presence of his companions, than by prevarication and wilful misrepresentation, pronounce his own condemnation in the presence of God, to whom all our actions and thoughts were known.³⁹

Sensing that these admonitions had “had their proper effect upon him” and that “a few words more would decide him to confess that he was blameable”,⁴⁰ Burchell reiterates his use of the Bible as iconic symbol by asking Van Roye to once again “lay his hand on the book”, but this time only “after repeating to him the substance of several passages in the New Testament”.⁴¹ These acts and exhortations had the desired effect, and Van Roye confessed that his conduct had not been “influenced by the spirit of obedience which that book taught and commanded a servant to show to a master”.⁴²

35 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 468.

36 Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

37 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 468.

38 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 470.

39 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 470.

40 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 470.

41 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 471. Unfortunately Burchell does indicate what particular passages he used.

42 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 471.

His own men, Burchell writes in his journal, “had received a useful lesson”.⁴³ But what lesson had Mothibi and the BaTlhaping learned? Unusually, Burchell is so consumed with establishing his authority among his own men that he neglects to comment on the impact of this incident on those sitting “at a little distance”, those “whose whole attention was fixed on” the proceedings. Those who sat silently watching would have seen remarkable things. They would have seen the Bible used both as a ‘closed’ object of power and as an ‘opened’ object with an authoritative message. As a closed object the Bible, it would seem, could be used by someone who controlled it to compel others to speak the truth and do their bidding; as an opened object the Bible contained knowledge that was of use in a context of contestation. The Bible, it would seem by association, shared certain features with weapons like the sword and the pistol. Clearly these and a whole host of potential associations may have been set in motion by Burchell’s use of the Bible. The Bible was now one more idea or artefact with which the BaTlhaping had to transact, and transact they would, for Burchell’s use of the Bible demonstrated that the Bible was a significant object of power.

It is not clear from Burchell’s account in which compartment of his wagon he kept and read his Bible. Did he keep it in public view, or was it to be found among his telescope, sextant and thermometer, “the glittering appearance of which might excite in savages the desire of possessing them”?⁴⁴ Burchell never, according to his record, offers the Bible to the BaTlhaping; this would be the task of those who came after him. And yet his visit lays a foundation of signs, and possible connections between these signs, to which the missionaries who came next would add. But, as we have observed, the BaTlhaping would make their own connections and construct their own significations. Clearly the Bible was an object of strange power; this had been demonstrated by Burchell. But was it of any potential use to the BaTlhaping? With this question in mind we move on, waiting among the BaTlhaping for the missionaries who were on their way.

The Uncovered Bible: Campbell’s Visit

The interest of European travellers to go beyond the frontiers of the Colony was an enduring interest. Having captured the imagination of Europeans on various visits, the BaTlhaping, the southern most clan of what would

43 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 471.

44 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 577.

become the Southern Tswana, received regular visitors. Having hosted trader-missionaries like Kok and Edwards, the BaTlhaping extended their hospitality to the representatives of organised Christian mission. “The Missionary Society, instituted in London, in the year 1795, for the sole purpose of diffusing the Gospel in Heathen and other unenlightened countries”, having first directed its attention to the islands of the Pacific, next turned its attention “to the vast continent of Africa. That long neglected and much injured country”.⁴⁵

After the death of Dr van der Kemp, “that valuable man who [pioneered and] superintended the African missions” on behalf of the London Missionary Society,⁴⁶ the Directors

thought it expedient to request one of their own body, the Rev. John Campbell, to visit the country, personally to inspect the different settlements, and to establish such regulations, in concurrence with Mr. Read and the other missionaries [already in South Africa], as might be most conducive to the attainment of the great end proposed—the conversion of the heathen, keeping in view at the same time the promotion of their civilization.⁴⁷

John Campbell, a director of the London Missionary Society, was commissioned and sent to the Cape in 1812 in order “to survey the progress and prospects of mission work in the interior”.⁴⁸ Campbell made his way from mission post to mission post in the Colony, and when he came to Klaarwater, which was then some distance north of the boundary of the Cape Colony—though the boundary was to follow him some years later (in 1825) almost as far as Klaarwater—he heard that Chief Mothibi of the BaTlhaping people, a hundred miles further to the north, had (allegedly) expressed some interest in receiving missionaries.⁴⁹ With barely a pause in Klaarwater, spending no more than a week there, Campbell and his party set off for Dithakong (“Lattakoo”), then the primary site of Chief Mothibi of the BaTlhaping, on the 15th June 1813.

We pick up the missionary trail and tale as they arrive with their five wagons at the Klaarwater settlement (which became Griquatown) on the night of

45 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, v.

46 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, vi.

47 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, vi.

48 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 178.

49 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 178.

9th June 1814.⁵⁰ We begin here because Klaarwater represents a midway point along the ‘colonialism’ spectrum, not yet part of the Colony and no longer entirely African controlled territory, offering insights into the kinds of transactions that took place in such ‘in-between’ sites. Campbell’s record, based on his journal and letters, is the primary source for this analysis, but as with each of these early sources, I am reading them for the represented voices of the local indigenous African peoples.

Having arrived during the night, Campbell wastes little time the next day connecting with the rhythms of the missionary components of the Klaarwater settlement. He begins by recording how he and his companions “attended their ordinary morning worship, at which two or three hundred were present”, and then goes on to relate how the day “was spent in conversing generally about missionary affairs”.⁵¹ In the evening “Mr Read preached to a large congregation, who all seemed attentive”.⁵² Christian mission is the primary focus.

But the closely aligned commercial interests of the imperial power he represents are not far off, as becomes evident during the next two days as Campbell does his rounds of the village and its environs. What draws his attention is “a large Dutch quarto Bible” in one of the local houses, and “parts of the New Testament” in two other houses.⁵³ But his attention is also drawn to the possibilities of and the problems with local industry. He comments on the local way of grinding wheat, considering it to be inefficient; he investigates the local water supply, assessing its potential for agriculture; he compares the local vegetable gardens with the missionary vegetable gardens, assessing the latter to be “large and very productive”.⁵⁴ Campbell and his company also visit the local “smith’s shop, where some of the people work in the best manner they could, but having no one to instruct them, they are not great proficients in the art”.⁵⁵ The imperial desire to instruct for productivity and profit connects both the divine missionary project and the imperial commercial project.

On the 13th, a Sunday, the journal entry is given over almost entirely to the former, missionary preaching, using the Bible to instruct. The day begins with a morning prayer-meeting, followed by preaching and a communion service later in the morning, which included local people and a range of visitors, including

50 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 162.

51 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 162.

52 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 162.

53 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 162.

54 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 163.

55 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 163.

“Griquas, Hottentots, Dutch, English and Scotch”.⁵⁶ In the afternoon, Campbell himself preaches. He describes both the preaching process and the preaching product. The process, “not so tedious as might be supposed”, involves two interpreters: “When I had spoken a sentence in English, Mr Anderson repeated it in Dutch, and a third person, (Captain Kok,) in the Coranna tongue”.⁵⁷ Campbell recognises that the translation in the Coranna language took “at least double the time to express” than it did in the English or Dutch, but he seems to trust that what he has said in English has been faithfully “repeated”.⁵⁸ The biblical text Campbell preaches on is 1 Peter 2:2, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1611, King James Version). The missionary-colonial project that Campbell is propagating envisages an integral connection between salvation and cultivation. The African and the African land required cultivation, with the Bible providing the sacred motivation and missionary endeavour as the biblically derived civilised model.⁵⁹ In Campbell’s own words, written during his second visit to the area in 1820, he notes that while indigenous cattle-places are extensive, being located as far as “the distance of one and two days’ journey”, the indigenous Africans “do not, as far as I have observed, raise grain at any of those stations”. He then goes on, immediately, to articulate the product he envisages from the missionary colonial project of salvation and cultivation:

Till the present system shall undergo a complete revolution, such a population can never abound in grain, nor can it become an article of trade. The land that may fairly be claimed by each nation is capable of supporting more than twenty times the population, if the ground were to be cultivated, which would require comparatively little labour.⁶⁰

Though important as part of the gospel and trade link between the Colony and the BaTlhaping, Klaarwater was not Campbell’s destination, though it does provide components of what Campbell hopes for among the BaTlhaping.

56 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 163.

57 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 164.

58 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 164.

59 See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 54–80; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 119–165.

60 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in That Interior of That Country* (Two vols.; vol. 11; London: Francis Westley, 1822), 60.

Campbell was aware that the BaTlhaping were the southernmost clan of a large cluster of 'Bechuana' peoples who shared a language and a centralised residential pattern, both of which made them ideal as an entry point for evangelisation into the African interior.⁶¹ So Campbell was "resolved to visit the city of Lattakoo, considerably higher up Africa".⁶²

On their way from Klaarwater to Mothibi's city, Dithakong, Campbell's acquisitive gaze maps out the terrain, speculating on the prospects for hunting, alliances, trade, mining, and agriculture. All of this potential is to be activated by the Bible, or, more accurately, "the word of God". For "[t]he gospel is remarkably fitted", notes Campbell as he studies the local peoples he travels among, "for rousing such sleeping, inactive minds, by placing before them the majesty and glory of the infinite Jehovah, the endless, unbounded felicity of the blessed, and the unspeakable misery of the wicked in the world to come—subjects which in all ages have produced wonderful effects on the human mind".⁶³ All that is required is "to teach some of them to read, and they will teach others", for "they will thereby be able to read the word of God".⁶⁴ Campbell imagines a process that will indeed be appropriated; what Campbell cannot control is what meaning and message Africans will produce when they control the interpretive process.

Travelling among the local peoples Campbell's reflects on African hospitality, imagining himself as a latter day biblical Abraham, travelling into a foreign land. "Some may have wondered", he writes in his journal, "how Abraham and other patriarchs, in the ages of antiquity, were permitted at pleasure to take up their residence, with numerous flocks, in countries where they were strangers, and without making compensation to the native inhabitants". But, he continues, "the same practice is customary in the interior of South Africa".⁶⁵ And while his own presence as a stranger seems to require no reflection, he reflects overtly about the presence of "Bushmen" strangers "in the Coranna country", and Coranna strangers "in the Bushmen country". "In this way", he concludes, "there is both a mixture of blood and of languages among the inhabitants of these regions",⁶⁶ designating, it would seem, the region between the Colony and the particular frontier represented by the BaTlhaping settlements.

61 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 178.

62 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 164.

63 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 170.

64 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 166.

65 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 173.

66 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 173.

As Campbell and his companions near Mothibi's place, they are escorted by "four [BaTlhaping] young men, about sixteen years of age, . . . whose faces were painted red and stroked with white paint in a regular way" to the "Lattakoo" river. Campbell correctly identifies these young men as those who "had lately been circumcised, as a sign of their having attained the years of manhood".⁶⁷ A few days later, Campbell will make a connection between the biblical Abraham and BaTlhaping circumcision. But for now Campbell's attention turns to their arrival at "the African city" of "Lattakoo".

Campbell's company arrives on the outskirts of Dithakong, Chief Mothibi's primary settlement (including "about fifteen hundred houses"),⁶⁸ in the afternoon of 24th June 1813. Having crested a hill, "Lattakoo came all at once into view, lying in a valley between hills, stretching about three or four miles from E. to W."⁶⁹ As they descended the hill towards "the African city", they were "rather surprised that no person was to be seen in any direction, except two or three boys", and the absence of an overt presence continued even as the wagons wound their way between the houses, save for a lone man who "made signs" for them to follow him. The stillness continued, "as if the town had been forsaken of its inhabitants", persisting even when they "were conducted" into the Chief's circular court (*kgotla*), "a square,⁷⁰ formed by bushes and branches of trees laid one above another". This space was not forsaken, for there "several hundreds of people assembled together, and a number of tall men with spears, draw[n] up in military order on the north side of the square". And then the silence was broken. "In a few minutes the square was filled with men, women, and children, who poured in from all quarters, to the number of a thousand or more. The noise from so many tongues, bawling with all their might, was rather confounding, after being so long accustomed to the stillness of the wilderness".⁷¹

Clearly all was not as it had seemed to the missionaries. Signed upon and conducted into a dense symbolic space not of their choosing or understanding,⁷²

67 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 179.

68 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 202.

69 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 180.

70 The "square" would have been round; that it is described as "a square" demonstrates both some recognition of the political space into which they had been brought and the desire to re-vision what they see; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 182–183; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 287–293.

71 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 180.

72 Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 54–60; Landau, *The Realm of the*

Campbell and company become the objects of BaTlhaping scrutiny. With a feeling of being “completely in their power”, Campbell confesses in a letter written some days later, “They narrowly inspected us, made remarks upon us, and without ceremony touched us. . . .”⁷³ The BaTlhaping “see”, “feasting their eyes”; they “examine”, and they “touch”.⁷⁴ Having been momentarily “separated”, and having “lost sight of each other in the crowd”, the missionaries soon gathered themselves, though they “could hardly find out each other”, and devised “a scheme, which after a while answered our purpose; we drew up the waggons in the form of a square, and placed our tent in the centre”.⁷⁵ Being led into a round “square”, they construct a square—one of the first of many laagers—which they (partially) control.⁷⁶ From this site of some control they plot and execute “the real object” of their visit, which they explain in the following terms to the nine local leaders, representing Chief Mothibi in his absence from the city,⁷⁷ who gather in their tent “a little after sun-set” on that day.⁷⁸

Through three interpreters, viz. in the Dutch, Coranna, and Bootchuana languages, I informed them that I had come from a remote country, beyond the sun, where the true God, who made all things, was known—that the people of that country had long ago sent some of their brethren to Klaar Water, and other parts of Africa, to tell them many things which they did not know, in order to do them good, and make them better and happier—that having heard since I came into these parts, to see how our friends were going on, that the Matchappees were a people friendly to strangers, I had come to Lattakoo to inquire if they were willing to receive teachers—that if they were willing, then teachers should be sent to live among them.⁷⁹

Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), xvii, 20–25.

73 J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D].

74 J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D].

75 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 180.

76 Campbell never quite copes with the way in which local people, mainly the leadership, just walk into “our tent”; Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 181, 184.

77 For an analysis of BaTlhaping structures of authority see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 144–152.

78 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 181.

79 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 182.

The leadership reply that they may not give an answer until Mothibi returns, after which there is an informal, it would appear, exchange of gifts: tobacco and milk.⁸⁰ A more formal, already ritualised exchange would take place on Mothibi's return, but while Campbell waits, impatiently, for the arrival of Mothibi the Bible is 'introduced'. Its recorded appearance is in the evening of the 27th June, only a few days after their arrival, when the uncle of the Chief, "Munaneets", a significant community elder,⁸¹ comes to Campbell's tent with an interpreter. In what follows there is "much interesting conversation", during which the Bible is explicitly designated in discourse.

The Bible was almost certainly present before this, but its presence must be inferred, for it is not explicitly designated. Two days earlier, on the first morning after their arrival (the 25th June) Campbell and his party hold worship in their kitchen—a house in "the square, used by them for some public purpose" but assigned to the missionaries as their kitchen—which is attended by "some of the people".⁸² It is hard to imagine the Bible not being present and not being used as either an unopened sacred object or an opened text during this time of worship. Similarly, during worship in the afternoon of the 27th, at which "[a]bout forty of the men sat round us very quietly during the whole time",⁸³ the Bible too must have been present. But the first explicit reference to the Bible in this narrative, where it is separated out from the normal practice and patterns of the missionaries, is in the discussion with the Chief's uncle.

In their constant quest for information and opportunities to provide information, scrutinising as they are scrutinised, the missionaries "enquired of him their reason for practising circumcision".⁸⁴ As indicated, Campbell had noticed a group of young men who "had lately been circumcised" and who were therefore required, he correctly supposed, to remain in seclusion, "not being permitted to cross it [the river] till a certain time in the day, for we afterwards observed them leave the town in the morning and never return until the evening".⁸⁵ These young men were probably an age regiment (*mophatô*) participating in the *bogwêra* initiation ceremonies.⁸⁶ Campbell also notices a

80 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 182.

81 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 33–39.

82 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 181.

83 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 191.

84 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 191.

85 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 179.

86 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 32–33; Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, 85–115.

series of ritual activities on the evening of the 25th involving women, perhaps the corresponding initiation ceremonies for young women (*bojale*), ceremonies that continue for a number of days, in which young women “marched at a slow pace” into “the square”, “holding long rods in their hands, and having their faces disfigured by white painted strokes in various forms”, “preceded by a number of matrons dancing and screaming”.⁸⁷

Using these ritual ceremonies as a pretext for proclamation, Campbell probes the BaTlhaping reasons for and antecedents of circumcision. The Chief’s uncle replies that “it came to them from father to son”. Sensing, no doubt, an opportunity ‘to instruct’, the missionaries continue to probe, asking: “Do you not know why your fathers did it?” To which the Chief’s uncle and his companions “shook their heads, saying, No”. Immediately the missionaries respond, Campbell reports, saying: “We told them that *our book* informed us how it [circumcision] began in the world, and gave them the names of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, as the first persons who were circumcised”.⁸⁸ The illocutionary intent of this information is clearly to establish an earlier, and therefore superior, claim of origin. Origins were becoming increasingly important to the emerging modernity of missionary England, and so the Bible was seen as particularly potent, containing as was supposed by the missionaries ‘the Origin’ of all origins.⁸⁹

However, what impressed the Chief’s uncle and his colleagues was not this claim to an all-encompassing origin, but, it would appear, the naming of the missionaries’ ancestors, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: “This appeared to them very interesting information, and they all tried to repeat the names we had mentioned, over and over again, looking to us for correction, if they pronounced any of them wrong. Munaneets, and the others who joined the company, appeared anxious to have them fixed on their memories”.⁹⁰ Here then is another hint at how the Bible may have been apprehended by the BaTlhaping: the book—the Bible—may have appeared, from the perspective of the BaTlhaping, to contain the names of the missionaries’ (and possibly even their own) ancestors, and hence would have been a book of great value.

87 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 185–186, 188, 191, 194–195; Comaroff, *Body of Power; Spirit of Resistance*, 114–118.

88 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 191–192, my emphasis.

89 The English were, of course, about to have their views on origins thoroughly shaken and stirred by the English explorer and naturalist, Charles Darwin; Darwin, *The Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963).

90 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

There almost certainly would have been considerable slippage and misunderstanding. The missionaries were intent on proclaiming the founding fathers of the Christian faith, but in naming these earliest ancestors of the circumcision ritual, a ritual central to the identity of the BaTlhaping, they may have been understood by the BaTlhaping to have been naming (forgotten) BaTlhaping ancestors. Such an understanding would, indeed, have imbued the Bible with strange and wonderful power, given the profound place of ancestors in the life of the BaTlhaping.⁹¹ The missionary attempt to subsume the BaTlhaping's oral account of circumcision under their textual biblical account may have marked the Bible, in the eyes of the BaTlhaping, as a site worth watching, and perhaps even occupying; or it may have demonstrated the dangers of this strange object of power. Significantly, there are signs here that not only are the missionaries not in control of their own bodies or space, they are also not in control of the shape their translated (through multiple languages) discourse takes.

Impressed, but probably also a little perplexed by this intense interest in the names of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, the missionaries carry on with their questioning form of instruction, asking next "if they knew any thing of the origin of mankind, or when they came". The BaTlhaping reply, ready to share their own origin narratives with these visitors who have shared their stories, "saying they came from some country beyond them, pointing to the N. which is the direction in which Judea lies."⁹² That two men came out of the water; the one rich, having plenty of cattle, the other poor, having only dogs. One lived by oxen, the other by hunting. One of them fell, and the mark of his foot is on a rock to this day". With no apparent attempt to engage with this African origin story in more detail, but with a clear indication of the inadequacy of this story (and the circumcision story), the missionaries immediately "endeavoured to explain to them how knowledge, conveyed by means of books, was more certain than that conveyed by memory from father to son".⁹³ The missionaries miss, not for the last time, an opportunity to connect with the (cattle filled) world of the BaTlhaping.

91 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 53–60.

92 This is a puzzling reference. Could Campbell be referring to the biblical Judea, and if so, might the missionaries have found confirmation that all of humankind, including these 'sons of Ham', derived from a single set of biblical ancestors (Genesis 9–11) from the biblical land of Judea? That Campbell thought in such categories is evident from a letter to Mr David Langton dated 27th July 1813, in which Campbell apologises for not having written sooner, saying that he has "written much from this land of Ham". Campbell then goes on to present Langton with an account of his visit to Dithakong (J. Campbell, Klaar Water, 27 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D]).

93 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

The Chief's uncle, "Munaneets", responds immediately, asking "if they should be taught to understand books".⁹⁴ The use of the modal "should" perhaps conveys, as it often does in English, a sense of asking permission; Campbell's reconstruction and representation of this dialogue (via three other languages) may accurately capture a concern on the part of the Chief's uncle as to whether, given the evident power of the book(s)—so openly exhibited by the missionaries but hidden by Burchell—the BaTlhaping would be granted access to the book(s). This concern would be echoed a century later, as we will see, by Isaiah Shembe, the founder of an African indigenous 'church'. For both Shembe and the Chief Mothibi's uncle, the particular focus of their concern is the Bible, and not books in general. That the missionaries and the Chief's representatives have in mind the Bible in particular is clear from the missionaries' answer: "We answered they would; and when the person we should send (provided Mateebe consented), had learned their language, he would change the Bible from our language into theirs".⁹⁵ That the Bible would remain the same when it was 'changed' from one language to another is an assumption the missionaries make, but an assumption that African appropriations of African vernacular Bibles would confound. The Bible does not remain the same when translated, as we shall see when at last the first Southern African language translation of the Bible is made among the BaTlhaping. But that is still nearly half a century in the future.

For now there are other related concerns incorporated into the BaTlhaping question. While "Munaneets" is both aware and wary of the 'change' that missionaries bring, he wants too to exploit this opportunity to forge lines of connection with the missionaries and their resources. So he flatters the missionaries, exclaiming, Campbell records, "I have heard more this evening than in all my life before. We must shut our mouths, and only hear!" And he goes on to say, "I acknowledge the things you have to tell us are good, from the change they have made on the Griquas and Corannas at Klaar Water".⁹⁶ The purpose of this flattery then becomes evident, as he goes on to elaborate on the hardships of life in their territory, wondering whether "those whom you shall send will not be satisfied [during times when rain and food are scarce], and will leave us"; and then goes on to describe the fate of those "who had gone beyond Lattakoo", all but one of whom "had been murdered".⁹⁷ Campbell recognises from this exchange that "there is little doubt but Mateebe and his people are

94 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

95 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

96 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

97 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192–193.

desirous that white men should not form any connection with tribes beyond them, on purpose that they may always be the channel through which all European articles may hereafter pass to the nations north of Lattakoo".⁹⁸ What is not clear, yet, to Campbell is that the BaTlhaping desire certain articles and not others. What is clear is the Bible may well be an article attracting the attention of the BaTlhaping.

However, one of the local elders was worried about this portent of outside instruction, including perhaps the presence of the Bible as a new (outside) site and source of power and knowledge, though quite how the Bible is apprehended by this protagonist is ambiguous. When "Munanets being sent for by his wife, abruptly put an end to the conversation", the conversation is taken up by "an old man". This old man, Campbell continues, "who is averse to our sending teachers, asked how we made candles, pointing to that which was on our table. He also said, he did not need instruction from any one, for the dice which hung from his neck informed him of every thing which happened at a distance; and added, if they were to attend to instructions, they would have no time to hunt or to do any thing".⁹⁹

This old man is probably an *ngaka* (a doctor/diviner/healer), given that he is wearing a "dice", probably the *tthabana* tablets, but also possibly the *bola* bones, both part of the *ditaola* (divining-bones) used in the practise of divination (*go laola*).¹⁰⁰ This fascinating transaction, re-presenting as it does a complex exchange, seems to suggest a profound grasp by this "old man" of the dangerousness of non-indigenous instruction and knowledge. The context of the discussion, and the centrality of the Bible in the discussion—if not also centrally positioned on the table in the meeting space¹⁰¹—makes it likely that he assumes that the missionaries' book(s) are their equivalent of his "dice." This conjecture finds some support from Robert Moffat's later account of an incident in which he writes, "My books puzzled them". "They asked if they were my 'Bola,' prognosticating dice".¹⁰²

Whether his aversion to "instruction" is an aversion to both the source (the Bible as a book of power and knowledge) and the interpreter of the source (the missionaries) is not clear. We must not assume that this "old man" shares

98 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 193.

99 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 193.

100 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 55–60.

101 Some days later during a visit from Mothibi's senior wife, Mmahutu, the Bible is clearly positioned on the table in the missionaries' tent (see below).

102 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), 384; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 345.

the assumption of the missionaries that the book and its instruction are one and the same thing. His concern that “if they were to attend to instructions, they would have no time to hunt or to do any thing”, may reflect the first signs of resistance to the time schedules and modes of production of the established mission station, church and school routines to the south, whose “notions of time, work, and self-discipline were drawn from the natural lineaments of the industrial capitalist world”,¹⁰³ in which case the focus of his aversion is the instruction regime rather than the source of power and knowledge itself, the Bible.

But I may be imagining a fissure where there is none, for this insightful “old man” may be making a simpler point; by pointing to the candles, and asking how the missionaries made them, he may be demonstrating an important difference between forms of knowledge that he and his people would find useful—how to make candles—and forms of knowledge that are potentially damaging and dangerous—knowledge of what happens “at a distance”, circumcision, ancestors, and origins. The Bible, the source of the latter, but not, it would seem from his analysis, of the former, is as much a problem as the instruction.

Fruitful as it is to attempt ‘to hear’ the indigenous African voice here, what is clear is that Campbell has no easy rejoinder to the astute questions and analysis of this “old man”. Campbell makes no comment at all on this exchange, which is odd.

Some days later (30th June), with the city still awaiting the arrival of Chief Mothibi, and with many significant interactions transacted each day, including the constant gathering and giving of information, the Bible is again foregrounded. Campbell’s major preoccupation during this time is seeking permission to “instruct the people”.¹⁰⁴ The local leadership, “Mateebe’s council”, insists that he wait for Mothibi’s return, saying they “could give no answer till Mateebe came”.¹⁰⁵ When Campbell and his men indicate an interest in using the time until Mothibi’s return “to visit a large village about a day and a half’s journey higher up the country”,¹⁰⁶ they receive a carefully orchestrated

103 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 179; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. The latter volume might be described as a detailed study of such routines and regimes.

104 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 196.

105 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 196.

106 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 198.

visit from Mmahutu, “the queen”, Mothibi’s senior wife.¹⁰⁷ She, it would seem, has been sent to persuade Campbell “to remain in the city”.¹⁰⁸

Her visit is preceded by layered looking. Being watched while he shaves in his tent, Campbell takes up his shaving mirror “to shew a person his own face in the looking glass which was in the lid of my box”.¹⁰⁹ The mirror, like the Bible, was another missionary brought object saturated with symbolic significance,¹¹⁰ and so this incident is an appropriate prelude to Campbell’s ‘showing’ of the Bible. After careful preparation by “the governor of the town in the absence of Munaneets”, who “brought with him the interpreter”, Mmahutu entered their tent and said that she “was averse to our going any where till Mateebe came”, and that if they did go, that “we should leave part of our waggon behind”.¹¹¹ Using her reluctance to have them leave as a lever, the missionaries assured her that they would never have thought of leaving Dithakong “even for a day before Mateebe’s return” had they “been permitted to instruct the people; but that having nothing to do”, they wished to visit that village and hunt. However, they are persuaded by Mmahutu not to leave, and once this matter is settled, the missionaries “endeavoured to convey some information”.¹¹² Not being permitted to instruct the BaTlhaping people in general, they attempt to instruct Mmahutu.

What follows is a remarkable exchange, signifying as it does both missionary collocations and a range of possible African appropriations of the Bible:

We explained to her the nature of a letter, by means of which a person could convey his thoughts to a friend at a distance. Mr. A. shewed her one he had received from his wife, by which he knew every thing that had happened at Klaar Water for two days after he left it. This information highly entertained her, especially when told that A. Kok, who brought it, knew nothing of what it contained, which we explained by telling her the use of sealing wax. The bible being on the table gave occasion to explain the nature and use of a book, particularly of that book—how it informed

107 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 198, 200, 207.

108 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 196.

109 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 198.

110 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 170–197.

111 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 198.

112 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 199.

us of God, who made all things; and of the beginning of all things, which seemed to astonish her, and many a look was directed towards the bible.¹¹³

Returning to a theme already raised, the superiority of text over against oral transmission from father to son, the missionaries draw Mmahutu's attention to the power of the letter as text in at least three respects. First, text can represent "every thing that had happened" across time and space. Second, text can reveal its message to the intended recipient. And third, text can conceal its message from the bearer. Turning from the letter to a quite different genre of text (from the perspective of the missionaries), the Bible, but here conflated with the letter (from the perspective of the BaTlhaping), the missionaries use the interest generated in their exposition of the letter to return to their preoccupation with the contents of the Bible, particularly the matter of origins.

Mmahutu is astonished, but what she is astonished at may not be what the missionaries imagine. From her "many a look" at the Bible it seems that she recognised this object's power. She recognised, perhaps, the Bible's capacity to both reveal and conceal, depending on who carried and controlled it, as well as the Bible's capacity to communicate about matters of importance to a community. The context of this encounter is elaborated on in a letter written by Campbell to a friend, Mr David Langton, some days later (27th July) in which he says more about this episode. Immediately following the final sentence in the quotation above, the following is added in the letter version: "Mr Read's eye caught a verse very suitable to our situation in the page that was lying open, viz. Math. 4-16".¹¹⁴ If this text was read, and the literary context of the letter suggests it would have been, Mmahutu would have heard this: "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (KJV). The choice of this biblical text casts some light on Mmahutu's questions, recorded in the next paragraph of the journal entry. For, Campbell records, Mmahutu responds immediately and "asked the following questions, evidently as things she had formerly thought of—'Will people who are dead, rise up again?' 'Is God under the earth, or where is he?'"¹¹⁵

Her questions, the first recorded questions posed to the Bible by the BaTlhaping people, do not seem to deal directly with the biblical passage read. The passage clearly makes sense to the missionaries, being made to bear the

¹¹³ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 199. Mmahutu, as we will see, would continue throughout her lifetime to cast anxious looks at the Bible.

¹¹⁴ J. Campbell, Klaar Water, 27 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D].

¹¹⁵ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 199.

full weight of English missionary images of Africa.¹¹⁶ However, such allusions are probably absent from Mmahutu's hearing of this sentence from the Bible. Whatever she hears, and it may be the word "death", prompts her to bring her own questions to the Bible (and the missionaries), disturbed as she and others have become by missionary talk of people rising from the dead, worrying especially that their slain enemies might arise.¹¹⁷

Already we see emerging evidence from this very early encounter of a recognition that the Bible represents forms of power and knowledge, and that this power and knowledge can be manipulated by those that control it. We also see signs that Africans are already bringing their own questions to the Bible, the beginning of a long process in which the Bible is prised from the hands of the missionaries by indigenous questions. For there are also signs here that Mmahutu may be wondering whether the missionary bearer of the Bible, like the bearer of the letter, might not know (all) the power and knowledge the Bible contains. Perhaps the missionaries are not fully in control of this object of strange power—the Bible—they carry; perhaps others—the BaTlhaping—could access its mysterious power? Furthermore, as with "Eva" before her, it may not be incidental that it is an African woman who probes alternative sites of knowledge and power.

There is no pause in Campbell's narrative at this point, failing as he does to recognise the significance of this moment. Having "answered her [Mmahutu's] questions", though we are given no hint of how her questions were answered, and having heard and accepted her concerns that they are not to leave the city until Mothibi's return, Campbell "shewed" her and her companions another example of European knowledge and order, a watch, "which both astonished and terrified them". Commenting on this reaction to the watch, Campbell says, "On observing the work in motion, they concluded that it must be alive, and on offering to put it to their ears, to hear it sound, they held up their hands to drive it away as if it had been a serpent".¹¹⁸ Mmahutu's interpreter also comments on this encounter with the watch, in the vernacular, saying "something to them which made them laugh immoderately". What he actually said was probably hidden deliberately from the hearing of the missionaries and so from us, for when translated, the missionaries "found he had said, that before he went to Klaar water [sic], he was as ignorant as they were, but there he had been taught

116 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 86–125.

117 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 403–405; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 342.

118 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 200.

many good things, which they also would be taught if Mateebe permitted missionaries to settle among them".¹¹⁹ How this could have caused Mmahutu and her companions to "laugh immoderately" is difficult to imagine, but the missionaries did not bother to probe any further, for they had heard what they wanted to hear. A publically translated transcript had been used to disguise the hidden vernacular transcript.

The multiple layers of language and translation clearly offered fertile ground not only for accidental misunderstandings but calculated misunderstandings, as the theoretical work of the Jean and John Comaroff (constructed around their work on the BaThlaping)¹²⁰ and James Scott¹²¹ on hegemony, ideology, and resistance amply demonstrate.¹²² Language in these early encounters was an obvious site for "infrapolitical" exchanges, "a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity [and/or ideology] of the actors".¹²³ Here we find "a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power,"¹²⁴ in which what was said was intended to communicate one thing to those in the know and another to outsiders.¹²⁵ Such misunderstandings are a very early "foundational"¹²⁶ form of infrapolitics, a form that was soon to be joined by a host of others as the contours of the colonisation became ever clearer and impacted more directly on the BaThlaping. Misunderstanding and misconceptions, as elementary forms of infrapolitics, are aptly appropriated by the Comaroff's as major metaphors of the "long conversation", "a dialogue at once poetic and pragmatic",¹²⁷ a dialogue, in the words of William Burchell, with

119 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 200.

120 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 13–39.

121 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

122 West, "Explicating Domination and Resistance: A Dialogue between James C. Scott and Biblical Scholars," in *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. Horsley; *Semeia Studies*; Atlanta and Leiden: SBL and E.J. Brill, 2004).

123 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 19.

124 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 183.

125 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 184.

126 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 201.

127 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 171.

“each party using his own language and comprehending very little of what was said by the other; and talking probably on subjects widely different”.¹²⁸

Here, in Campbell’s tent within Mmahutu’s village, is a “discernible” BaTlhaping “commentary . . . spoken less in narrative form than in the symbolism of gesture, action, and reaction, and in the expressive play of language itself”.¹²⁹ Quite what this commentary (on commentary) says is difficult to determine, but perhaps the reaction to the watch (the first layer of commentary) is not unrelated to the reaction to the Bible, given their proximity in the missionaries tent (and narrative). Here, perhaps, are two “devices capable of working transformations”,¹³⁰ “indispensable tools” in navigating, charting, incorporating, and so transforming that which was other.¹³¹ Juxtaposed in missionary narrative and missionary tent the Bible and watch comment on each other, each occupying a particular place in the missionaries’ scheme of things, but just how they are commented on by Mmahutu and her translator must remain somewhat obscure, deliberately so for the missionaries, but also, perhaps, somewhat inchoate and incipient for the indigenous commentators themselves as they observed for all they were worth in an attempt perhaps to find a place for these “goods of strange power”¹³²—including the Bible—in their changing world.

Though the presence of missionaries heralds in retrospect the encroachment of colonialism for Mmahutu and her people, from the perspective of the BaTlhaping at that time the missionaries are just another set of visitors with whom the BaTlhaping must transact. Burchell’s and Campbell’s journals record a steady stream of visitors, most of them Africans, among the BaTlhaping. Though the missionaries’ lines of connection with the Colony are of particular interest to the BaTlhaping, the terms of engagement are established, at this time, by the BaTlhaping. This is particularly clear when Mothibi returns.

128 Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 433.

129 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 171.

130 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 185.

131 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 186. I add the Bible to the Comaroff’s inventory of devices such as looking glass, clocks, telescopes, and compasses.

132 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 182.

The Probed Bible: Conversations with Mothibi

That Mothibi does not rush back from his other business to receive the missionaries is itself significant. They are just one more set of visitors with which he must transact. Indeed, the BaTlhaping in general are not at all clear on why Campbell and his company have come among them. That they have come to trade is the prevailing assumption, and during each day forms of trade do take place. But there is also the assumption that the Europeans “had come to revenge the death of Dr. Cowan” (another English traveller),¹³³ for on the 2nd of July Campbell observes that “many people returned who had fled from Lattakoo, on our arrival”,¹³⁴ fearing reprisals.

When Mothibi does return, he initially “acted as if ignorant that strangers were there”, giving precedence to a consultation with “his people crouched down in the form of a circle, when Mateere [“the governor of the town in the absence of Munaneets”]¹³⁵ related to him every thing that had taken place during his absence”. Mothibi then went on to relate “the circumstances of his own excursion”.¹³⁶ It is only then that Campbell and his party are summoned, “in consequence of orders”, to come before Mothibi, “when, without looking towards us, he stretched out his right hand” to receive them and their formal greeting. “During all this”, Campbell notes, “there was not the smallest alteration in his countenance. He appeared thoughtful, deep, and cautious”.¹³⁷ Mothibi’s show of power and control continues, for he continues to ignore them, for “[a]fter conversing some time with his chief men, Mateebe stepped into the house which we called our kitchen, sat down by the fire, and conversed with Adam Kok, who accompanied us from Klaar Water, evidently to sound him respecting our intentions”. Continuing to demonstrate his control of the situation, Mothibi, “[a]fter remaining about two hours in the square, without appearing to notice us, he went across the road to his house, having hinted to A. Kok, that when he had rested, he should converse with us on the object of our visit, which would be about the going down of the sun”.¹³⁸

Having made the Europeans wait since noon, “About sun-set, Mateebe, attended by his brother, and some of his chief men, approached our tent”.¹³⁹

133 See Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 196–197.

134 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 203.

135 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 198.

136 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 206.

137 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 206.

138 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 206.

139 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 207.

"On entering, he sat down and remained in silence", at which point Campbell "made him a present of some trinkets", including a copper comb, a silver headband, and a chain, and then his own carefully chosen present, the lid of his shaving box which contained a looking glass.¹⁴⁰ From a related letter it seems that Campbell ritualised this gift giving ritual further by performing the gifts: Campbell took "a gilded copper comb and put it in his hair, and tied a silver spangled band and tassel round his head, and a chain about his neck, and last of all presented him with a looking glass. . . ."¹⁴¹ In the journal entry Campbell makes it clear that he is watching Mothibi carefully to see how he reacts to each particular gift. But Campbell too is being watched, and Mothibi is determined to maintain control of the meeting. "During the whole proceeding, he sat motionless".¹⁴² Then, undeflected by his image in the looking glass, Chief Mothibi ruptured the ritual public transcript just enough to unsettle the missionaries, by assuring them: "'You would have been perfectly safe, though you had not had Adam Kok and his friends with you, or though I had received no presents'".¹⁴³

It is clear, even from Campbell's account, that Mothibi knows the Griqua leader Adam Kok, for he goes on to record, that, "He then desired A. Kok to consider himself as much at home in Lattakoo as at Klaar Water. On which A. Kok thanked him, and told him that Mr. Anderson and Mr. Read had both presents of tobacco for him".¹⁴⁴ In the very midst of this missionary endeavour Africans are having their own conversation.

With the preliminaries out of the way, from the perspective of the missionaries, important as the role of gifts were in constructing "a social relationship by acting as a vehicle for the self",¹⁴⁵ Campbell then began to tell, via the mediator Kok, Chief Mothibi of his real purpose, namely, "to instruct the nations of Africa".¹⁴⁶ More specifically, Campbell continues, having heard in Klaarwater

140 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 207.

141 J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D].

142 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

143 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

144 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

145 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 183. Campbell, like Burchell before him, was contributing towards the construction of a mythology of gift-giving—a ritualised practice informed by colonial notions of the indigenous other. See Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol 2, 398–399. For a more detailed account of the practice of gift giving and its significance see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 183–188.

146 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

that Mothibi's people "would be glad to have teachers as well as other nations", he, Campbell, "had undertaken a journey to his country to ask permission to send them, and his protection for them when with him".¹⁴⁷

Mothibi's immediate response to this request, even though it was framed in such a way that acknowledges local BaTlhaping control, was to object, saying that "his people had no time to attend to their instructions, because they had to attend to their cattle, to sowing, reaping, and many other things", a refrain that resonates with the concerns of the "old man". "[B]esides," and here again the "old man" encountered earlier foreshadows his Chief, Mothibi continues (and Campbell is here quoting him), "the things which this people teach are contrary to all our customs, which the people will not give up".¹⁴⁸ Knowing that the looking glass deflects as much as it reflects, Mothibi probes behind it and cuts to the cultural heart of the matter; like the "old man" who saw the world behind the Bible, Mothibi sees the world behind the looking glass.

But Mothibi recognises that for his own people's interests he must negotiate with this missionary world, so his refusal is then modified. Without a pause in Campbell's reported re-presentation, Mothibi continues: "It would not do for them [missionary teachers] to live at Lattakoo [Dithakong], but should they be willing to live at a distance, I should have no objection to send some of the children to them to learn the Dutch language".¹⁴⁹ What follows is worth quoting in full, juxtaposing as it does the Bible, the looking glass, text as power and knowledge, and writing.

I [writes Campbell] stated to him that the teachers we should send, would convey information of the true God who made the heavens, the earth and all creatures and things in them—of his love to the world—of the laws he has given respecting good and evil, and pointing to a bible which lay on the table, I assured him that that book contained every thing missionaries had to make known to him and his people, and that when missionaries should learn his language, they would change all its contents into his language. He seemed, by a significant shake of his head, to intimate that he considered what I said, an impossibility. To convince him that things could be written in his language, we read to him the names of his predecessors and all his family. For the first time he smiled, on hearing their names read over, and seemed full of astonishment and pleasure. We then assured him, that instruction would not interfere with

147 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

148 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

149 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

industry; that the inhabitants of my country were industrious, as he might be convinced of, by our clothes, waggons, and so forth, which they made—that his people would not be compelled to receive instruction, for only those who were willing would be instructed, and they would not interfere with his government. After answering some other objections, the king said, “SEND INSTRUCTORS, AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO THEM”.¹⁵⁰

That the Bible might be understood by the BaTlhaping to gather, locate, and collocate other goods of power in ways the missionaries were unable to apprehend seems plausible from such an account. We will have to wait and see what indigenous South Africans did do with the Bible but for now Mothibi's smile is sufficient to point to the possibility of appropriations of the Bible beyond the comprehension and (mis)conception of the missionaries. So while it may appear that the missionaries have had their way, at least in part, and the capitalised final sentence signals their sense of success, Mothibi's final sentence itself is full of ambiguity, and the terms of the conversation as a whole are far from clear.

This conversation, and the longer conversation within which it is a moment, always had two components: its overt content, what was talked about, and alongside these exchanges another kind of exchange, “an often quiet, occasionally strident struggle between the Europeans and Africans to gain mastery over the *terms* of the encounter.”¹⁵¹ We might identify four crucial domains that constituted the struggle to dictate the terms of the conversation, each of which would become more evident in the years that were to follow: “issues of production and time, . . . [which] were to mark out the central arena of debate and struggle between colonizer and colonized”;¹⁵² “the politics of space, in which both parties tried to appropriate the physical context in which their interactions (literally) ‘took place’; the battle to control dominant material and symbolic values . . .; and the contest over the media through which the conversation itself was proceeding, over the very nature of language and representation”.¹⁵³

But for now, the conversation with Campbell continues. On the 6th July, a day after this extended conversation, Campbell visits “the king's house”, where

150 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208–209. Campbell's account of this encounter in a related letter is more or less identical; see J. Campbell, Klaarwater, 26 July 1813 [CWM. Africa. South Africa. Incoming correspondence. Box 5-2-D].

151 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 199.

152 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 179.

153 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 199.

he offers a gift of earrings “to each of the queens”. Mothibi, writes Campbell, “now embraced the opportunity to ask what seemed to have all along been in his heart, viz. for a gun”.¹⁵⁴ Mothibi has his own purposes in keeping the missionaries close at hand, but also good reasons for not giving them open access to his people.

Later in the day, at noon, Campbell records, “we had a public meeting in the square by desire of Mateebe, with himself and as many of his chief men as chose to attend”. Representing the missionaries are Campbell, sitting on Mothibi’s right, “Mr. Read on his left, and Mr. Anderson next”.¹⁵⁵ Both Read and Anderson would, later, establish a missionary base close to Mothibi’s main settlement. For now, they are part of Campbell’s party, and once the participants are settled, sitting in “half circles” on the ground before those seated on missionary stools, including Mothibi, Campbell returns to what is on his heart.¹⁵⁶ “We began by stating the truths which our missionaries would teach. Mateebe repeated how little leisure his people had to learn. We told him we had daily observed many men, women and children doing nothing, and that a missionary would have plenty of work to teach such”.¹⁵⁷ This back-and-forth, done through translators seated on the ground in front of the stools, reflects the difficulty each set of actors has in representing their world. Clearly puzzled by Campbell’s comment about “many men, women and children doing nothing”, Mothibi shifts the conversation back to the world of the missionaries, attempting to understand the larger logic within which the Bible made sense.

Indicating that he had followed these and other earlier missionaries’ biblical teachings, but within his own cultural and narrative frame, Mothibi “expressed surprise, that if all men came from one father and mother, as white men assert, they so differed from one another”. Responding from their own world view, the missionaries offer a prompt riposte, “We observed that in one family the dispositions of children often differed”.¹⁵⁸ Recognising misunderstanding, Mothibi again takes the initiative to shift the conversation, though the shift is only a shift of angle, as Mothibi once again tries to make sense of the biblical narratives he has heard, saying, “the missionaries would be safe, for when two of his people murdered John Kok, he brought them to his wife to shoot them, that when she would not, he did it”. Again, the missionaries respond, maintaining their focus on the Bible as perhaps Mothibi had hoped, having been told, no

¹⁵⁴ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 210.

¹⁵⁵ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

¹⁵⁶ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

¹⁵⁷ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

¹⁵⁸ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

doubt about the conversation with Mmahutu a few days earlier, saying, “We told him that in that case he acted according to the directions in our book, which says, ‘he that sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed’”.¹⁵⁹

Though part of the same paragraph in Campbell’s journal, Mothibi’s next contribution to the conversation signals both his fundamental understanding of the missionary purpose and his desire to end this particular moment in the larger conversation. “He said”, Campbell records, “‘Whenever the missionaries have got enough, they shall be at liberty to depart’”.¹⁶⁰ Campbell recognises that the BaTlhaping can only say this, “having no idea that they can have any other view of [our] coming but gain”.¹⁶¹ But this is not the final word in a conversation that lasted two hours, for Mothibi adds, at the end, “I believe there is a God who made all things, who gives prosperity, sickness, and death, but I do not know him”.¹⁶² Campbell assumes incorrectly, commenting on this final contribution, that “[t]he knowledge he has, undoubtedly came from the missionary station at Klaar Water”.¹⁶³ While the occasion to reflect theologically in this way may have come from the missionary station at Klaarwater, the content of the reflection is filled with indigenous religious understanding. Understanding the missionary ‘God’ to be Modimo, the BaTlhaping “creator of all things and the moulder of destiny”, but rather remote from the world of humanity,¹⁶⁴ Mothibi expresses his people’s surprise at missionary claims to know Modimo. Mothibi and his people are, perhaps, intrigued by this claim, wondering if the kind of direct relationship the missionaries claim to have with God/Modimo might bring with it significant forms of additional power.¹⁶⁵

This formal conversation reverberates through the day, as later in the day “a person stated as an objection to missionaries coming, ‘that when praying, they would not see the enemy coming upon them’—and another said, ‘they never would be able to sing’”.¹⁶⁶ Here are further attempts to make sense of missionary practice and its possible implications for BaTlhaping life, focussing on more pragmatic matters than questions about Modimo and the Bible. But the Bible remains a focus of reflection, for Campbell notes how “[o]ne of our

159 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

160 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

161 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

162 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

163 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211.

164 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 53; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 75–76.

165 For similar reflections on another African context see Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 217–218.

166 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 211–212.

people over-heard Mateebe say to some of his people, who were sitting at a fire in our kitchen—"These men have been born before us—they know more than us—they make us dumb".¹⁶⁷ Once again Campbell hears what he wants to hear, a recognition of the superiority or priority of missionary knowledge. But what Mothibi is perhaps articulating here is BaTlhaping reflection on whether and to what extent the knowledge represented by the Bible precedes (or fills in gaps within) the BaTlhaping oral memory, containing as it seems to do ancestral narratives about circumcision and other matters that resonate, partially, with the BaTlhaping, being in continuity, to some extent, with their own practices.

From Campbell's journal entry of the 6th July, a day of many conversations, and of the 7th of July, their day of departure, it is clear that there is substantial contestation among the BaTlhaping about the missionaries, what they represent and what their presence might portend. Some disrupt the evening worship of the missionaries, while others attend the (disrupted) worship, visiting the tent of the missionaries afterwards, assuring the missionaries that they would "prepare the mind of Mateebe to accede to our wishes".¹⁶⁸ On the morning of their departure, Mothibi is vague about the movements of his own people, but implies that the missionaries will be consulted about any major migration. And then, just as Campbell is about to leave, "[i]n conversation, Mateebe observed, that some of his people died by the hand of God, and others by witchcraft".¹⁶⁹ Clearly Chief Mothibi continues to reflect 'theologically', attempting to make connections between the religio-cultural narratives of the missionaries and the religio-cultural narratives of the BaTlhaping.

The Bible, both as oral-aural narrative and as text-book, has its own presence during these short visits. In the next chapter we will consider the Bible's more extended stay among the BaTlhaping, as the Bible becomes more distinctive and so is separated out from missionary Christianity in a number of ways.

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 212.

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 212.

¹⁶⁹ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 223.

The Dislocated Bible

the King as in the forenoon asked for the Bible, which was again laid on the ground and gazed at with wonder for a considerable time.¹

This chapter considers how the Bible begins to elude the grasp of those who brought it among the BaTlhaping. The heuristic horizon of the book as a whole is that the Bible can be and indeed was considered to be separable from missionary and colonial Christianity. Among the BaTlhaping, with whom we remain for this chapter, we have witnessed how local African questions and reflections are brought to bear on the Bible. In this chapter we observe how the Bible is physically taken out of the hands of the missionaries who had settled near them.

Just before John Campbell departs from Chief Mothibi's settlement he devotes considerable time to collating and transcribing information on the "countries" and peoples "beyond Lattakoo".² His journal pages are crammed with bits and pieces of information gleaned during his short visit among the BaTlhaping. His account is a mapping of people and places, including a positioning of the BaTlhaping among their neighbours, drawings of BaTlhaping "ornaments and utensils", and lists of "Bootchuana words".³ While this mapping would be put to a variety of colonial uses in due course, both the more general the more immediate purposes of this cataloguing is presented in Campbell's journal:

The desire of knowing the interior of Africa is very strong in Europe, and probably can be gratified by missionaries gradually penetrating into the country. Missionary stations are surrounded by moral atmospheres, or have a moral and civilizing influence to a considerable distance around, beyond which it is extremely hazardous for white men to go. But when a missionary settlement has existed some time at Lattakoo, another may easily be introduced among the Wanketzens ["the next tribe or nation

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- 1 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824 [CWM/LMS/Africa/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box9/1823–1825/2/B], 3.
 - 2 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1815), 216.
 - 3 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 213–222.



FIGURE 3 *Sotho-Tswana peoples of the Interior.*

north of Lattakoo”]⁴ and others, who on their visits to Lattakoo will become acquainted with the missionaries—will witness the advantage derived from their residence among that people—will hear various things

4 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 213.

which the missionaries teach, and on their return to their own lands will report what their eyes have seen, and their ears heard. This intelligence will probably produce a desire that missionaries may visit them also, and thus invitations will be sent to Lattakoo, requesting that white men may be sent to instruct them also.⁵

Central to the moral and civilising capacity of a site, particularly this site, would be the Bible, when it was translated. Talk of the Bible's capacity to communicate was a feature of Campbell's visit. The missionaries had emphasised "how knowledge, conveyed by means of books, was more certain than that conveyed by memory from father to son", and the BaTlhaping wondered about what the Bible might say about (their) ancestors and cultural practices.⁶ Campbell had assured them that "when the person we should send (provided Mateebe consented), had learned their language, he would change the Bible from our language into theirs".⁷

During their first meeting with Chief Mothibi, however, Mothibi made it clear that he "objected" to "teachers" coming among them. But if missionaries would be "willing to live at a distance" from the BaTlhaping settlement, he would "have no objection to send some of the children to them to learn the Dutch language".⁸ Mothibi, it would seem, wants to maintain control not only of the location of the missionaries but also of their language and what is to be done with it. Campbell counters by turning to a terrain of translation that he considers to be the exclusive preserve of the missionaries, the Bible:

I stated to him that the teachers we should send would convey information of the true God who made the heavens, the earth and all creatures and things in them—of his love to the world—of the laws he has given respecting good and evil, and pointing to a bible which lay on the table, I assured him that that book contained every thing missionaries had to make known to him and his people, and that when missionaries should learn his language, they would change all its contents into his language.⁹

5 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 224. There is probably an allusion here to 1 John 1:1. For a detailed discussion of "evangelical colonialism" in general and a particular mission station in detail see de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996).

6 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

7 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 192.

8 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

9 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 209.

Mothibi is not convinced, but about what precisely is not clear from the missionary record: “He seemed by a significant shake of his head, to intimate that he considered what I said, an impossibility”. Campbell assumes that the problem is translation: “To convince him that things could be written in his language, we read to him the names of his predecessors and all his family. For the first time he smiled, on hearing their names read over, and seemed full of astonishment and pleasure”.¹⁰ Again, quite what draws forth Mothibi’s smile is not clear. What is clear is that translation is already a terrain of struggle.¹¹

But it was to be some considerable time before Bible translation became a significant feature of BaTlhaping life. Before translation, however, the Bible was being probed in other ways, as the BaTlhaping attempted to separate the Bible from the hands of the missionaries who held it. However, the missionary presence (and so the Bible’s) among the BaTlhaping would take much longer to materialise than Campbell would have anticipated from Mothibi’s smile.

The Unsettled Bible: Negotiating Place

Both James Read and Robert Hamilton had been with Campbell on this visit to the BaTlhaping, and they among others would attempt to negotiate a missionary base among Mothibi’s people. James Read was a veteran Missionary Society missionary who had for many years navigated the rapidly shifting political and racial landscape of the Cape Colony and its frontiers, and he took the lead in attempting to establish a place for a mission station among the BaTlhaping. And while we will follow some of Read’s story, we will do this via the narrative of a more ordinary ‘artisan’ missionary, Robert Hamilton, who did the day-to-day work of ‘mission’.

On the 13th January 1816, at Griqua Town (as Klaarwater was now called), Hamilton had “a meeting with the brethren to consult on our proceeding further to Latakkoo, when it was thought proper that we should go with some of the friends here and speak to the King and enquire if they were still willing to receive us”.¹² A few days later, on the 16th, Hamilton had a meeting with “Captain Kok [who had also been there during Campbell’s visit and who was well known to Chief Mothibi] and two others who had been lately at Latakkoo”.

¹⁰ Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 209.

¹¹ See also Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 214.

¹² R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816 [CWM South Africa Journals Box 2, 1810–1816], 17. The page number refers to the numbered pages of Hamilton’s journal.

"They informed us that the King was still waiting for the Missionaries, and would receive them, and further that he would remove to the Cromman River".¹³

So the missionaries put together a party, including two locals, "John Hendrick (... esteemed a worthy man and had given himself up to the Missionary example)" and "a Bochuanna who is a believer in the Son of God", and follow the same route they did with Campbell, contributing to the construction of paths between the Colony and the interior.¹⁴ They arrive in "the city" at about noon on the 17th February. Hamilton says very little about their short stay, recording only that Mothibi "showed us great kindness", bringing them milk "almost every morning and breakfasted with us in the waggons", and then somewhat abruptly that "[w]e left Latakkoo [on the 21st] much cast down on account of their rejecting the blessed message of Salvation which we intended to publish among them, but the will of the Lord must be done ...".¹⁵

The *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society* for the years 1815 (though this date is crossed out) to 1819 (though the date 1820 is added) includes extracts or summaries of Hamilton's letter as well as the letter of John Evans and so flesh out the visit.¹⁶ It is the Griqua leader Adam Kok who translates for the missionaries, just as he had translated for Campbell,¹⁷ providing a local African mediating voice yet again. It is Kok who introduces the missionary party, saying, "These are the persons sent to you according to the promise of Mr. Campbell".¹⁸ To which Mothibi replies, somewhat oddly, given the power relations, "They may come; they can protect me".¹⁹ Is Mothibi being flippant, or is he already envisaging an alliance with the Colony via the missionaries that will offer protection from unspecified forces? Mothibi does not elaborate on this stage whisper, instead he immediately goes on to modify his invitation, saying, "But ... this place is not fit for them; they will need much water; the Krooman would be better".²⁰

Endeavouring to endear themselves to the BaTlhaping leader, the missionaries then inform Mothibi, via Kok, "that Mr. Hamilton was able to make useful articles in wood; and that another Missionary (Mr. Barker) was coming, who

13 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 18.

14 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 18–19.

15 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 19–20.

16 See also the account in du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Dir Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825* (Pretoria: Die Staatsdrukker, 1989), 49–51.

17 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 208.

18 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*: 30.

19 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

20 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

could work in iron, make hatchets, &c. and that both could work for him as much as he pleased". "With this information", the report continues, "he was delighted, and observed to Capt. Kok, that he could not think of rejecting persons introduced by him".²¹ As with Campbell's visit, so now Mothibi relates to Kok rather than to the missionaries. The missionaries are clearly somewhat put out by this, insisting that their presence and purpose be acknowledged: "When he was again asked whether they might come and live with him, he replied, 'They may come to the Krooman', but when it was repeated, 'But they desire to come and reside in this place under you', he answered, 'I will speak to my captains respecting their desire'".²²

The next day, the 18th February, when "they were again introduced to the king, when he was asked whether they might depend upon what he had said about their coming to reside at Latakkoo; his answer was, 'Yes, you may come; you must not live at a distance, but near me, that I may take care of your cattle'".²³ Having established, it would seem, a relationship in which wood and iron work would be done for the BaTlhaping and in return Mothibi would take care of their cattle, the missionaries now complicate the transaction by reiterating their primary purpose in coming to Dithakong: "The Missionaries then informed the king, that they were come for the purpose of instructing the people, and desired to know whether he would permit those who wished to be instructed to attend them".²⁴ Mothibi's response is immediate, "Will any of the people come? They have no desire". Kok intervenes, explaining, "that the Missionaries only wish to know, whether if any are inclined to receive instruction, you will prevent them".²⁵ Mothibi is now reluctant to give a definitive answer: "To this he gave no direct answer, but said, 'The people must hunt, prepare skins, herd the cattle, go on commandoes; they have also customs among them, as circumcision, painting their bodies—they will not be inclined'".²⁶ The missionaries persist, refusing to reflect on the succinct summary Mothibi has given them of the ways of his people.

21 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

22 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30. Mothibi persists in addressing Kok, a fellow African, referring to the missionaries in the third person.

23 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

24 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

25 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30. The mixing of 'voice' here is as it is in the original, without inverted commas to indicate what exactly is quoted direct speech.

26 LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

The Missionaries said they would be ready to teach any who would attend, were they only the children, and desired to know if he would allow that. He replied, 'They will no understand'. The Missionaries added, that they would by no means interfere with the customs of the people, and should any such thing be attempted, he would be at full liberty to banish them from his dominions. To this he made no reply.²⁷

On the 20th the missionaries have "a third interview with the king".²⁸ Though the missionaries push for a definitive commitment from Mothibi, he is evasive, reluctant to have them reside with him and reluctant to refuse them some place of proximity. It is Jan Hendrik,²⁹ another African presence among the missionaries, who informs the missionaries that "he overheard some of the people speaking much to one another against the return of the Missionaries to Latakkoo, the king being present".³⁰ Jan Hendrik's report brings matters to a head:

When therefore, they were about to depart, they thought it absolutely necessary to speak to Mateebe on this subject, in the presence of his captains, and request a positive answer. They therefore said to the king, through Captain Kok, "We doubt not that you are still of the same mind, that we should return and reside here". The king replied, that he did not promise Mr. Campbell that the Missionaries should preach or instruct the people—that he himself would not be instructed: but, added he, "As say the people, so say I; you must not come to reside among us—you may dwell at the Krooman, and traffic with us in ivory, skins, and other articles, as Edwards and Kok did, but you must not teach the people".

Mateebe also addressed the people thus: "Speak your minds. When the men were at the other place (Mr. Campbell and Mr. Read), you remained silent; and when they were gone you blamed me. Therefore now speak out, that you may not blame me again". Many of the people then exclaimed, "The Missionaries must not come here". The king added, "And I say the same as the people; the Missionaries much not come here".³¹

²⁷ LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

²⁸ LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 30.

²⁹ Also spelled as 'Jan Hendrick'.

³⁰ LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 31.

³¹ LMS, "Mission to Latakkoo," 31. See also the account in Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), 228–232.

Back in Griqua Town, the missionaries “agreed to meet every Thursday evening and Sabbath evening for prayer to plead with God to bring light out of this darkness, and to ask counsel from God who hath said, If any man lacks wisdom let him ask it of God”.³² While waiting to consult with Read about another visit to Dithakong, Hamilton notes that a group of BaTlhaping came to Griqua Town for the purpose of trade, taking with them on their return tobacco “to exchange” for cattle. The missionaries are surrounded by trade and the movement of cattle, whether traded or raided cattle. The trading and raiding of cattle is a distinctive feature of the interior, forming a backdrop to what the missionaries imagine is happening centre-stage with them as the primary protagonists as they struggle to establish a mission station among the BaTlhaping. In the African realities of the interior, cattle are centre-stage. So the BaTlhaping go about their normal business while Hamilton waits.

When Read does not arrive “according to expectation”, the missionaries decide to go ahead with another visit to Dithakong, sending John Hendrik on the 10th June, who was asked “to do all in his power with the King and people to recommend that Gospel and of course the Missionaries”.³³ It would appear that John Hendrick’s visit too was unsuccessful, though Hamilton does not say anything more about his visit. Instead, he focuses in his journal on yet another visit to Dithakong, where they would “offer ourselves and if rejected return to the Colony as our provisions were almost done”.³⁴

But it is not until August 1816 that a ‘resolution’ to take this trip takes place. Hamilton notes that they have “procured men for our journey to Latakoo

32 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 20. For Jan Hendrik’s perspective on this ‘failure’ see Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and Their Communities during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 35. Stephen Volz provides a detailed reconstruction via the fragments available of African agency in the “establishment of a Tlhaping mission”; Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 35–45.

33 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 21. For more on “John Hendrick” or Jan Hendrik, a local African, see Schoeman, *The Early Mission in South Africa/Die Vroeë Sending in Suid-Afrika, 1799–1819* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2005), 149–157; Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 43–44. For more general analysis of indigenous agents see Bradford, “World Visions: ‘Native Missionaries’, Mission Networks and Critiques of Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Canada,” in *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous Southern African Responses to Colonialism, 1840–1930* (eds. Limb, et al.; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); Lawrance, et al. eds, *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

34 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 21.

with difficulty, I may say with great difficulty, as the missionaries here were all against our going, and when they are against any thing at a station it is not easy to accomplish it". However, because Hamilton had heard a report, repeating the now regular refrain that "Matebee said if the missionaries should come again he would receive them", he together with the other missionaries "thought it was our duty to go".³⁵

When they arrive in Dithakong a few weeks later Mothibi is not there, but they are well received by two of Mothibi's brothers. However, there is murmuring among the BaTlhaping, loud enough for the missionaries to hear, so that the missionaries hear that "[t]he people speak against the teaching coming among them". Later, Hamilton records that, "At our evening worship not one was present".³⁶ As the days pass, so more rumours of resistance reach the missionaries, with some among the BaTlhaping saying that "we the missionaries would change their . . . customs like that people at Griqua Town, who once wore a carross, but now wear clothes, one had two wives but now one". "This", said the BaTlhaping informant, "the Boochuannas will not submit to". When the missionaries take the initiative and ask the people directly "about receiving missionaries", they "answered that they should do as Matebee did". In an attempt to secure the support of Mothibi, the visiting missionaries leave a generous gift of tobacco, "to be given him at his return".³⁷

During their brief stay of about a week, it is not only their attempts at procuring permission to establish a mission station among the BaTlhaping that proves unsatisfactory. Trade too is hampered by a clash of moral and theological orientations. When the BaTlhaping "brought many elephants teeth to exchange for beads", the missionaries refused, "knowing it is contrary to the wish of the Directors of the Missionary Society".³⁸ And when, on a Sunday, the BaTlhaping "brought us things to exchange for tobacco and beads . . . we refused to exchange on that day", making it clear in the report that the reason for this refusal was "as the people here know nothing of the Sabbath". "This", recognises Hamilton, "displeased them a little and they all went away".³⁹ But what Hamilton does not recognise is that the ideology and the practice of the missionaries is not self-evident and that the BaTlhaping are continually attempting to make sense of this world. On the 30th September, with their sheep depleted and "no hope of Matebee's return for a long time, we thought

35 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 23.

36 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 25.

37 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 25.

38 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 25.

39 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 26.

proper to return to Griqua Town and from there to the Colony as soon as possible". In an entry full of irony, Hamilton records how, as they leave,

Many came with us to the outside of the Town, and shook hands with us and laughed. There was more joy when we went out than when we came in. We left the Town with the thought of seeing it no more, and oh how sad the thought of leaving 10 thousand in the dark Prison of the Devil, while Christ the light of the world is come. Holy Father, thy will be done.⁴⁰

They reach Griqua Town on the 11th of October, with Hamilton writing: "Thus ended another long journey, without obtaining our object, which was to ask Matebee if he would let us live among them without any reference to teaching. But God ordained it otherwise that we had no opportunity of speaking to the King".⁴¹ But Hamilton's gloom is short-lived, for they receive a letter from Read on the 14th of October indicating that he is on his way, with Hamilton's tools (for Hamilton is an artisan) and provisions, and that Read intends "to proceed to Latakkoo,⁴² and if possible to obtain permission to settle among them, and if not to form a Station" at the nearby Kuruman River,⁴³ southwest of Dithakong and "about three days journey nearer to Griqua Town".⁴⁴ Read, as he has written, sets off for Dithakong having "considered the mission to Latakkoo as a very serious undertaking. The man that goes there must carry his life in his hand;

40 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 26.

41 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 26. After this visit, John Evans "decided to abandon mission work in the region". As Volz goes on to note, "Among Evans' stated reasons for leaving were his inability to put the 'rude speech' of the Batlhaping into writing and his discomfort living 'among savages'". The matter of translation is discussed more fully in the next chapter. "At the same time", Volz continues, ever attentive to African agency, "Evans felt that [Cupido] Kakkerlak and other African evangelists were 'very suitable for such savage tribes in S. Africa in the introduction of the gospel among them,' and 'it is truly pleasing to hear many of the Hottentots teaching their countrymen the pure gospel and the influences of the Holy Ghost attending their labours with great success'"; Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 37.

42 This is Hamilton's spelling; the more common spelling is 'Lattakoo'.

43 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 27.

44 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 14, 1818," (London: The Missionary Society, 1818), 33.

for there the devil reigns without control, and to cast him out requires nothing less than power divine".⁴⁵

Hamilton informs Read, when he arrives a few days later, that he "must first go to the Colony for my Books which I had left there, and for provisions which I wanted and in that time he could go and find a place, which he agreed to".⁴⁶ And with this Hamilton withdraws into the background of the narrative, as Read takes centre-stage and takes over the narration. But Hamilton will shortly become the primary narrator when Read falls into disrepute and is redeployed by John Campbell, on his second visit, and replaced by Robert Moffat who takes control of the mission among the BaTlhaping.⁴⁷

But for now we follow James Read as he makes his way to Dithakong, arriving there on the 28th December 1816 with Cupido Kakkerlak and Jan Hendrik, African converts from the northern frontiers of the Colony.⁴⁸ While Hamilton, as we will see, goes about the mundane work of mission, Read's focus is securing a site for a mission station, building an infrastructure for mission, and in representing this mission work to the directors of the Missionary Society. Read's letters and journals receive an increasingly central place in the regular reports of the directors to the Missionary Society. Anticipating Read's arrival among the BaTlhaping, William Anderson writes, "The object may seem small to some, but to me it appears one of the most important that the Society has undertaken. Should that door be opened, what a field presents itself to view! Many, many thousands by their miseries, cry for the success of the Lattakoo mission".⁴⁹

The door, as we have noted, could not be easily opened. Chief Mothibi was determined to keep the missionaries "on the borders of his realm, close enough to be a source of valued goods and skills but too far away to have direct access to his subjects". Read, on the other hand, "wanted to situate his station where it might insinuate itself into the moral landscape of the Tlhaping, visible both

45 LMS, "Extract of a Letter from Mr. Read, Dated Bethelsdorp, Aug. 7, 1816," *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*: 32.

46 R. Hamilton, 26 November 1815 to 6 December 1816, 27.

47 For more on James Read see Saunders, "James Read: Towards a Reassessment," *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Collected Seminar Papers* 7 (1977).

48 Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa: A Documentary History* (ed. Suttner; 2 vols.; vol. 1; Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009), 37.

49 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Third General Meeting of the Missionary Society, in London, on Thursday, May 15, 1817," (London: The Missionary Society, 1817), 32–33.

as an inspirational example and as an epicenter of the godly rural nation he hoped to cultivate”.⁵⁰ While Mothibi was, in Read’s words, “cool”, reiterating “the old objections, viz. that the Bootschuannas were a different people to us, and would not submit to our rules, customs, dress, &c. &c.”, Read is insistent, giving “little heed to these objections, but told him, that in conformity to the agreement with Mr. Campbell, the good people of the country beyond the great water had sent Missionaries; that they had rejoiced much at his having promised to receive such, and had been very generous in sending by the Missionaries, plenty of articles to make him and his people happy . . .”.⁵¹ Read attempts to coerce Mothibi, implying a kind of contractual agreement with Campbell.

But while Mothibi does not relent on his decision not to provide the missionaries with a permanent site, they do receive permission from Mothibi to “span out under the large tree”. The very next day, a Sunday, the 29th January 1817, Read takes the opportunity of this proximity “to commence preaching”, recounting the moment as follows:

A great many Bootschuannas assembled round our waggons, and the words, “Preach the gospel to every creature [Mark 16:15]” were so powerful, that I could not think of asking permission from man, but proposed to J. [Jan] Hendrick to commence preaching. Berend [Barends] therefore commenced, and preached to about 200 through the interpreter, they sat in general still, except four, who were dressing a skin, but who nevertheless listened with attention. The rest of the day however, there was great confusion. Towards evening we spent about an hour singing, during which time there was more order.⁵²

The next day Read’s African colleagues take the initiative, both in securing a temporary site from Mothibi in which “we might build” and in continuing to ‘converse’ about the gospel, to which “some mocked, some listened with attention, but we found in general a great aversion to the gospel, and a rooted prejudice to their ancient opinions”.⁵³ Mothibi is as adamant as Read is insistent, confronting Read the day after the compulsion to preach, ‘informing’ “us, that

50 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 201.

51 LMS, “Extracts from Mr. Read’s Journal of His Late Journey from Griqua Town to Lattakoo, and His Reception by King Mateebe,” *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*: 127.

52 LMS, “Extracts from Mr. Read’s Journal,” 127.

53 LMS, “Extracts from Mr. Read’s Journal,” 128.

many of his people were against his receiving us; that they said we might stay, but *not preach or teach*". One of Mothibi's people went further and "demanded" that the missionaries cooperate with BaTlhaping commandos as a condition of staying, to which Read replies that, "I would assist them in any thing but plunder and murder".⁵⁴ Contestation of their presence is apparent, so that even the temporary site they are allocated is a compromise, "not susceptible of much improvement".⁵⁵

"The Journal of the Mission" for the next few months is full of the contestation around space,⁵⁶ though the missionaries continue to follow as far as possible their own rhythms, within which the Bible makes a regular appearance. On the 2nd January Barend Barends, before returning to Griqua Town, "preached a farewell sermon from 1 John, iii, 1, 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God'".⁵⁷ On the 4th of January the missionaries dig a well, "and obtained water enough to supply the whole city; we also built a wall around it to keep the cattle away".⁵⁸ On the 5th, a Sunday, the missionaries hold "an early prayer-meeting", and when Mothibi visited them "in a friendly manner", they "informed him, that this was a resting day with us, God, who created the world in six days, having rested on the seventh, and commanded that day to be kept holy; but that we observed the first day in imitation of the apostles of Jesus Christ, who on the first day of the week rose from the dead, after his crucifixion".⁵⁹ On the 6th the missionaries present Mothibi with "the watch sent for him by the Directors".⁶⁰ Later that day they visit the home of "Chakkie, a Bootchuana, who had accompanied us from Griqua Town", where they "found him with three others, who were purifying him after a sickness", one of whom, "an old man, seemed to act as priest". When the missionaries probe, asking "Chakkie what these things meant; he smiled, and appeared to be ashamed to tell us, being convinced of the vanity of such superstitions, as he had before informed us".⁶¹ And later still on the same

54 LMS, "Extracts from Mr. Read's Journal," 128.

55 LMS, "Extracts from Mr. Read's Journal," 128.

56 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo, Soon after the Arrival of the Missionaries; Extracted from the Journal of the Mission," *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*, 409–412.

57 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 307.

58 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 307.

59 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 307–308.

60 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 308.

61 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 308.

day the missionaries record in detail local customs associated with an “assembly” of the BaThlaping, within which they are partially incorporated.⁶²

The “business of the meeting” soon turns to the presence of the missionaries and the related topic of missionary participation in BaThlaping commandos. Read’s refusal to participate in commandos is used by one of the speakers, an “old chief”, who asserted “that there was now no sovereign in Lattakoo—that things were permitted which were never permitted by their forefathers—that what the Missionaries said was idle talk [‘that they should pray’ rather than participate in commandos], yea falsities, and that if Mateebe suffered them to dwell in Lattakoo, the government would be destroyed; that the Bootchuanas had too many customs to listen to the word of God...”⁶³ The extensive debate about the commando and whether the missionaries should be compelled by Mothibi to participate, as had Jan Kok by Mothibi’s father, occupies the missionary narrative, as the “whole assembly now broke up in a very confused manner”.⁶⁴

Later in the day, Mothibi visits the missionaries and makes it clear why he has supported the missionary position with respect to commandos. He “told us what has passed in the *Pietso* (or General Assembly of the Chiefs), and observed, that he had spoken much in our favour; and communicated our resolution not to join in their war expeditions, or interfere in their political affairs”, to which the missionary report immediately comments “which latter we had not noticed”.⁶⁵ Mothibi is making it clear to the missionaries that they have his support in their ways only on condition that they do not interfere in the ways of his people. The missionaries, recognising this, are quick to modify their stance: “We again assured him, that should an enemy invade his city, assistance would be given by the Missionaries, but not otherwise”.⁶⁶ As if to seal this partial pact Mothibi brings the missionaries “a bowl of thick milk” and the missionaries reciprocate by giving Mothibi “a supply of tobacco”.⁶⁷

On the 9th of January the missionaries visit “the Lower Town, and declared the word of God to the people”, and on the 10th “a sermon was delivered to them [including Mothibi and several BaThlaping] from John iii.3”: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he

62 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 308–309.

63 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 309.

64 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 309–310.

65 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 331.

66 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 331.

67 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 331.

cannot see the kingdom of God" (KJV).⁶⁸ And when Mothibi visits again on the 11th, remaining for their morning worship, "Jan Hendrick spoke very impressively on the fall of man".⁶⁹ Later on the same day, when invited by some of the BaTlhaping to "speak of the things from above" in response to ongoing conversation among themselves about "the subject of our message", the missionaries "spoke at length to them on the way of salvation by Jesus Christ".⁷⁰ And when Mothibi "and a number of chiefs" are present at their morning worship on the 13th of January, "A discourse was delivered on the Saul's conversion".⁷¹ As the missionary narrative notes, the BaTlhaping, and their neighbouring visitors,⁷² are paying careful attention.

Mothibi is clearly using this temporary residence period to gauge how his people feel about the missionary presence. The missionaries keep pushing for "a positive answer upon the subject" of where they can establish themselves, and whether Mothibi will relocate with them. But the matter among the BaTlhaping is far from settled, so Mothibi prevaricates.⁷³ The missionaries do not refrain from preaching and teaching, so Mothibi has much to reflect on. The BaTlhaping are clearly divided and conversations continue among them, some of which finds its way into the missionary record.⁷⁴ Missionary public worship itself becomes a site of contestation, with some of the BaTlhaping kneeling at worship and others refusing to do so. One in particular, "Kallassa", used public worship to recount a dream, in which, "'When I came into your tent, I saw the Bible, and felt such a love to it, that I put my hand and said, 'Remain here' (meaning, let the word of God continue at Lattakoo)'"⁷⁵ A few days later "Kallassa" "expressed a wish to be able to read the Bible".⁷⁶

When a rainmaker visits the town on the 21st January the missionaries refuse to offer him a gift of tobacco, though prompted to do so by "our friend Makweetsie", who "appeared to regard him with great reverence, and intimated, that it would be proper for us to present the man with some tobacco, for his useful services". Now it is the missionaries who refuse to show respect, for "he was a deceiver". Instead, the missionaries engage in an adversarial interrogation of

68 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 332.

69 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 332.

70 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 332–333.

71 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 333.

72 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 333, 336.

73 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 334.

74 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 336, 370.

75 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 371.

76 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 372.

the rainmaker, silencing him (in their narrative), and then proceeding to give him “some account of the contents of the Bible”.⁷⁷ The rainmaker, however, “remained during our morning worship”, as did Mothibi, attempting to understand the missionary message. In the evening part of that message becomes clear as Jan Hendrik “preached on the subject of the Last Judgement, after which we had a pleasing conversation with the Bootchuanas”.⁷⁸

Pushing the boundaries of their presence, the missionaries, on the 22nd January, “[b]egun to-day to catechise the members of the church of Bethelsdorp who are at Lattakoo, and their children”.⁷⁹ Again, they are carefully observed by the BaTlhaping as they formally and formulaically instruct. On the 23rd, with Mothibi present at their worship, “Jan Hendrick spoke with much emotion of the sufferings of Jesus Christ”, and the missionary narrative records how “very attentive” all appeared.⁸⁰ But participation fluctuates, following rhythms the missionaries are unable to decipher. On the 26th “our church, or enclosure”, our “place of worship (under the great tree)”, was “nearly full”. The next day, in the morning, “there was not one Bootchuana present”, but in the afternoon “a great many attended, and Brother Jan Hendrick preached from Isaiah xiv.19–25, with much ability and animation. Few Bootchuanas attended in the evening”.⁸¹ Those who heard Hendrik’s sermon would have heard the following biblical text read, and then interpreted with reference to them:

But you have been cast out of your tomb like a rejected branch, clothed with the slain who are pierced with a sword, who go down to the stones of the pit like a trampled corpse. You will not be united with them in burial, because you have ruined your country, you have slain your people. May the offspring of evildoers not be mentioned forever. Prepare for his sons a place of slaughter because of the iniquity of their fathers. They must not arise and take possession of the earth and fill the face of the world with cities. “I will rise up against them,” declares the Lord of hosts, “and will cut off from Babylon name and survivors, offspring and posterity,” declares the Lord. “I will also make it a possession for the hedgehog and swamps of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” declares the Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, to

77 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 371.

78 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 371.

79 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 371.

80 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 372.

81 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 372.

break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them and his burden removed from their shoulder" (NAS).

With a message like this is no wonder that Mothibi would give "no answer, and appeared quite indifferent" to those who were making an argument for offering the missionaries a place among them.⁸² The love of God proclaimed at the beginning of January has by the end of January been superseded by the wrath of God. February follows a similar rhythm to January by the missionary Christian calendar, the only difference being that "the sufferings of the Son of God" and God's judgement of the world in the story of "Noah's Deluge" now dominate the missionary message. Jan Hendrik has been taught well, for as Read acknowledges, "he showed much talent" in this trajectory of preaching. But many among the BaTlhaping are disturbed by the missionary preaching, and even Mothibi indicates that "he wished us to leave Lattakoo", that "we had better go there [the Kuruman] and sow corn". Speaking behind their backs, Mothibi is overheard to say "that he would not have the Gospel". And even those among the BaTlhaping who attend the public worship of the missionaries confide that they "found it difficult to understand".⁸³

March, however, signals a significant shift. The gun Mothibi has requested from the Directors has not arrived, and some among the BaTlhaping, demonstrating that they have paid attention to missionary dispatches,⁸⁴ are using this "against us, by saying, that he would be deceived by us". "Considering, therefore, that a long time would elapse before the gun would arrive from England, and that he might begin to doubt the fulfilment of our promise, we resolved to present him with one of our own".⁸⁵ Vindicated in front of his detractors, Mothibi declares, "Let them now come and see; let them now talk; I have got what my forefathers never possessed. The news will spread through the city immediately, and all will come to see this great present, and be convinced of your sincerity, &c."⁸⁶ And soon the missionaries too have something to see, for they finish building and thatching "a dwelling house", to which "the people flocked in great numbers to view the house, which was a wonder to all". Mmahutu, who has demonstrated an interest in aspects of the missionary way

82 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 372.

83 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 373–374.

84 When Mothibi is asked by Read "if he had any thing to say to the Directors", he answers that "he wished them to send him a gun . . ."; LMS, "Extracts from Mr. Read's Journal," 128.

85 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 409.

86 LMS, "Transactions at Lattakoo," 409.

of life, “expressed a wish to have a similar one built for herself”, and the missionaries “accordingly promised to build one for her”.⁸⁷

Conversation about the missionary message and, indirectly, about the Bible continue, as do less detailed conversations about local BaTlhaping customs, through March,⁸⁸ but the seminal moments are the giving of the gun and the building of a house—and the decision of Mothibi to ‘prepare’ another commando and to accompany it personally, a decision that takes the missionaries by surprise “that the King had not himself acquainted us with his intention”.⁸⁹ At the same time the missionaries receive news via letters from Adam and Cupido Kok, “written from the Krooman”, where they had “ascertained, that the Bootchuanas on that river were desirous to hear the word of God, and that were no Missionary sent to them, they would move to some place where a Missionary resided”.⁹⁰

Juxtaposed in the missionary narrative, Mothibi’s commando and the missionaries’ letters from the Kuruman River portend the future, with each party struggling to secure a future in which each might have its way. As Mothibi prepares to leave on the commando he is at pains to point out that “we must not consider his conduct as implying any rejection of our message, and that we must stop and speak to those who remained behind, and also take charge of the women and of the city”; and as he leaves the city, having attended the missionary worship, with Mmahutu, her children, and his “weapons of war with him”, Mothibi addressed the missionaries: “I am now going away, and commit my wife and children, and the town, to your care. Keep you eyes on them; live in harmony”.⁹¹

The Relocated Bible: Hamilton’s Mundane Mission

This commando, ironically, provided the missionaries with added impetus to secure a site among the BaTlhaping. Mothibi was seriously wounded on the commando and the missionaries played a role in his recovery, resulting in Mothibi pledging that “he should cling to us, and should follow us where we

87 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 410. As already indicated, Mmahutu’s questions may reflect gender differences in how aspects of the mission were perceived among the BaTlhaping.

88 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 409–411.

89 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 411.

90 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 411.

91 LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo,” 412.

chose to go".⁹² However, Mothibi insisted on the missionaries relocating to the Kuruman River, and so unable to remain among the BaTlhaping at Dithakong, Read had to be content with Mothibi's allocated site some thirty miles south-west of Dithakong, at the site of the earlier trading post and mission of Kok and Edwards.⁹³ By insisting on this site,⁹⁴ Mothibi not only constructed a buffer between his primary settlement and the Colony, he also resolved "the contradiction posed by the Europeans—whose power to protect from external threat was also the power to undermine the polity from within".⁹⁵ "They believe", writes Read about the BaTlhaping, being more perceptive than most missionaries, "that the very day they give their consent to receive the gospel they that moment must give up their political authority, their manner of dress, marriage, circumcision, etc. and although we affirm to them the contrary they say they have eyes to see how it has gone at Griqua town (formerly Klaarwater)".⁹⁶

"On the 4th of June 1817, the Missionaries removed to the Krooman, and commenced their preparations for the settlement",⁹⁷ Bible and plough in hand.⁹⁸ Having been allocated some space, Read set about filling it, constructing a house and a forge alongside it at what was known as 'New Lattakoo' (Maruping). When Hamilton joined Read a few weeks later, Hamilton used his tools to begin construction of a water-mill.⁹⁹ The BaTlhaping, it is reported to the Missionary Society back in London, were "filled . . . with astonishment" at both the forging and use of metal tools.¹⁰⁰ Watching the missionaries at

92 du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Dir Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825*, 58.

93 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 201.

94 LMS, "Extracts from Mr. Read's Journal," 127–128.

95 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 201.

96 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 179.

97 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 33. See also LMS, "Lattakoo," *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*: 157–159, 184.

98 Villa-Vicencio and Grassow, *Christianity and the Colonisation of South Africa*, 37. "Let it be remembered", said Read on his arrival among the BaTlhaping, "that in Africa the Bible and the plough go together". See also du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Dir Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825*, 58–62.

99 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 202.

100 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 33.

work in the forge, some of the BaTlhaping are overheard to say that those who do such things “must be a god”, and others to say that “they were highly favoured, for God had come to visit them”. What the missionaries read into these fragments of translated speech is an acknowledgement of their ‘superior knowledge’, which they hope will translate into spiritual knowledge. There is a clear connection in the missionary minds “that the avowed superiority of the Missionaries in the knowledge of the useful arts, may prepare the minds of the people for listening to their spiritual knowledge”.¹⁰¹

In the same report to the directors of the Missionary Society it is noted that “[t]he printing-press for Lattakoo is arrived at Griqua Town; and the Missionaries have begun to compile a dictionary and catechism in the Bootsuanna language. We hope ere long to hear that reading, writing, and printing have been commenced at Lattakoo”.¹⁰² This hope would be regularly deferred, though the rhetoric of translation would continue. In the following year’s report (1819) on developments at “New Lattakoo” considerable space is given over to translation. It is noted that, “The mechanical labours of Mr. Hamilton had been so unremitted, as to prevent him from devoting much time to the acquisition of the language. His progress therein had consequently been small”.¹⁰³ Tacitly accepting that much of the mundane work of the mission fell to Hamilton, but worrying that Hamilton would not have the time (or capacity) to contribute to the important work of translation, the report contemplates other options.

As, however, it appeared of great importance to the success of the mission, that books in the Bootchuana tongue should be provided, it was in contemplation by the Brethren at this station, to request the services of Mr. Helm, of Griqua Town, whose acquaintance with the original Scriptures, and progress in the Bootchuana, would soon enable him to prepare for the press portions of the Bible in that language.¹⁰⁴

101 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society,” 33. See also Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 119–165.

102 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society,” 33.

103 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fifth General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 13, 1819,” (London: The Missionary Society, 1819), 77.

104 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fifth General Meeting of the Missionary Society,” 77.

While European metalwork, including Read's plough and Hamilton's tools, were viewed by the missionaries as preparing the ground for spiritual knowledge, it was the Bible, among other books, that would enable the ground to yield an abundant spiritual harvest. But as we will see, the BaTlhaping's regard for the Bible requires that it be considered separately from the missionaries.

While we wait for the Bible to become more readily apparent to the BaTlhaping, Read was busy with establishing a mission station among the BaTlhaping at the Kuruman and other missionaries were busy plotting his removal. Though Read had been nominated to succeed Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp as superintendent, "in the event of his decease or departure from the Colony",¹⁰⁵ "Read never seems to have exercised the offices of superintendent", for after Campbell's return to England, "the duties of superintendent came to devolve upon Rev. George Thom".¹⁰⁶ It was Thom who suspended Read at a meeting in Cape Town in August 1817, as Read's close relationships with the local Africans, including his marriage to an African women, as well as an adultery scandal, and allegations about the general "state of things, when the mission was under Read's management",¹⁰⁷ were all used to marginalise him.¹⁰⁸

But such were Read's relationships with local Africans like Chief Mothibi that he was reinstated and regularly (re)called upon to play a role in the Missionary Society's work. He did, however, withdraw (and was withdrawn) from the public realm, leaving it to Hamilton to represent the fledgling mission station among the BaTlhaping. In the 1817 report to the directors of the Missionary Society, Read features prominently, being involved in at least four of the mission projects.¹⁰⁹ In the 1818 report Read is formally effaced by passive syntax and the regular use of the generic "the Missionaries". Read is not even listed in the "Missionary Society's Stations & Missionaries" section of the report. Alongside "Lattakoo" only Hamilton is listed, even though Read is still there.

Hamilton takes on his new role with considerable deference to his masters in London and substantial loyalty to Read, writing: "Revd Sir, knowing that you

105 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), 138.

106 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 139.

107 Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa*, 141, Saunders, "James Read: Towards a Reassessment," 20–21.

108 du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Dir Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825*, 62–66; Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 45–50.

109 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Third General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 23–24, 26–29, 31–33, and Postscript.

wish to hear from all your Missionary Stations, and also from Latakkoo, and on account of what is between the Society and my dear Brother Read who keeps a regular Journal but is at present hindered from corresponding with you (which I hope will not be long), I thought it good to send you a few extracts, beginning from April 1818".¹¹⁰ This account of a year's worth of mission among the BaTlhaping provides a useful characterisation of the contours of ordinary day-to-day mission. Amongst the considerable detail on offer we will find regular mention of the Bible.

The church building that Hamilton has been working on "was finished, all except the pulpit", on the 24th July, and was formally opened on the 1st of August, accompanied by the slaughtering of an ox as Chief Mothibi's contribution, and prayer and preaching as the contribution of the missionaries.¹¹¹ During the "public worship", which is preceded by "a short prayer meeting", Hamilton reads Psalm 84 and Read preaches from "Isaiah 56, last part of verse 7, to a great many Bootchuanna who had come to eat of the ox", adds Hamilton. And, commenting on the meal with Mothibi and the BaTlhaping leadership in Read's house, Hamilton says, "They all enjoyed it much, I believe more than the sermon".¹¹² Hamilton, as we will see, is contrasting two related but quite different forms of food, the bread/meat of the Bible and the bread/meat of the BaTlhaping.

After all had eaten we again went into the Church. When John Hendrick began by reading the 14 of John. After prayer was offered up I preached from Psalm 132, from the 14 verse to the end. Many Bootchuanna present. Afterwards the Missionaries all drank tea together. We had also King Mateebe with us. The Evening Service was began by Mr Read reading the 29 of first Chron. John Hendrick spoke from Matt 11–28, which concluded the services of the day. I trust that the Bootchuanna will in that House have many feast days for their immortal souls.¹¹³

The services of the day are saturated with the Bible's presence. Particular portions of the Bible are read aloud (and translated), the written word becoming oral-aural word; and particular portions of the Bible are preached, the written word being proclaimed to the BaTlhaping, with their own translators having

110 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819 [CWM, South Africa, Journals, 1816–1824, Box 3, 68], 1.

111 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 4–5.

112 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 4–5.

113 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 4–5.

the final word. The biblical texts for this day are carefully chosen, with each one contributing to a biblical theology of place. Psalm 84 begins, “How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God” (verses 1–2, NAS).¹¹⁴ The rest of the Psalm affirms the priority of this place, and it ends with the following proclamation:

For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You! (verses 10–12)

Read’s choice of biblical text demonstrates something of his own more inclusive theology, embracing as it does Mothibi’s slaughtering of an ox in celebration of the opening of the church. Isaiah 56:7 reads: “Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples” (NAS). Hamilton is probably unsettled by the theological implications of the first part of the second sentence of verse 7, so he emphasises that Read focussed on the “last part”.

The second part of the service in the church, after the meal, continues with the biblical theme taken up in the morning. Chapter 14 of John’s gospel is part of a farewell discourse spoken by Jesus to his disciples, beginning, much like the Psalm 84, with an emphasis on place: “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (verses 1–2, NAS). Psalm 132, from verse 14–18, is selected because this section could be understood, as it is by the missionaries, to refer to God’s identification of the “New Lattakoo” as God’s designated habitation:

This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her needy with bread. Her priests also I will clothe with salvation, And her godly ones will sing aloud for joy. There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth; I have

114 Because it is not clear what translations of the Bible are used, and because the translations being used would have been translated and re-translated, I have chosen a fairly literal English translation.

prepared a lamp for Mine anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon himself his crown shall shine (verses 14–18, NAS).

The “Evening Service” is again infused with the Bible. 1 Chronicles 29 is another text chosen by Read, it would seem, for it adopts elements of an ancient Israelite religio-cultural practice that would resonate with the religio-cultural practice of the BaThlaping, including the offering of animal sacrifice. In the Chronicles text “King David” catalogues the provisions he has made for building a “house” or “temple” for God, provisions which will, he hopes, be used by his heir designate, Solomon, to undertake the building project:

So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, “Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You; and give to my son Solomon a perfect heart to keep Your commandments, Your testimonies and Your statutes, and to do them all, and to build the temple, for which I have made provision.” Then David said to all the assembly, “Now bless the Lord your God.” And all the assembly blessed the Lord, the God of their fathers, and bowed low and did homage to the Lord and to the king (1 Chronicles 29:10–20, NAS).

This reading invokes and remembers the earlier visit of Campbell and his reading of the names of the ancestors of biblical circumcision. It also recognises

and affirms a close relationship between God and the king. But it goes further than Campbell was prepared to go, for following verse 20 the text continues: "On the next day they made sacrifices to the LORD and offered burnt offerings to the LORD, 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams and 1,000 lambs, with their drink offerings and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. So they ate and drank that day before the LORD with great gladness" (verses 21 and 22a, NAS). The choice of Matthew 11:28 is more typical of missionary piety and evangelisation: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (NAS).

Significantly, each of the officiating missionaries, even the "native agent" Jan Hendrik,¹¹⁵ handles the Bible and either reads from it or preaches on it. The Bible is tangible, a very real presence. And even though Hamilton does not think the BaTlhaping engaged with what was preached, they were perhaps more attentive than he thought, and they would certainly have noted the centrality of the Bible in the ritual processes of these church services. There were elements on offer that would have resonated with their own realities, though we are not now offered the opportunity to hear how they might have reconfigured those features that did resonate.

Later in the month there are indications that the BaTlhaping have been paying attention to the Bible and to the preaching. A perennial area of contestation during this period of missionary settlement among the BaTlhaping is how much to allow the missionaries to interfere in their "laws". The missionaries' primary purpose is interference, so the BaTlhaping are regularly redrawing the lines of acceptable interference. On the 12th August "[t]he King called a General Meeting of his people to hear their minds with respect to us as touching their Laws".¹¹⁶ The incident that has precipitated this meeting is a series of events related to the theft of some of Jan Hendrik's cattle a few days before. When information is received that neighbouring 'Bushmen' have stolen the cattle, and that their location is known, Mothibi sends out a "commando" to retrieve the cattle, a commando which includes Jan Hendrik and two other missionaries. Confronted by this commando, the 'Bushmen' withdraw into dense bush. Jan Hendrik calls on the women and children to come out "with a promise of saving their lives", and when they do he then persuades the men too to come out, "with the intention of bringing them home". However, the BaTlhaping wanted to kill the two men, one of whom had been wounded, but Jan Hendrik "refused and said that the cattle were his and that he had a right

115 Schoeman, *The Early Mission in South Africa*, 149–157. His name is variously spelled.

116 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 6.

to do with the Boshesmen what he pleased". "But", writes Hamilton, "nothing would restrain them. They fell upon them and killed them both".¹¹⁷

The matter does not end here, for Hamilton records that on the next day "[t]he Commando returned much discontented and threatened to go from the Town and leave us, because they said we would hinder them from killing the Boshesmen and alter their Laws". This, then, is the occasion for Mothibi's general meeting.

Mateebe then dressed in his best garments stood up in the middle of his armed men and addressed the meeting, but first calling on the Bootchuanna men and women all to sit down, then our Dutch people (meaning us and our people) also to sit, and after commanding silence he spoke for about half an hour, declaring his determination to kill the Boshesmens, men, women, & children if they took away their cattle. He also openly declared his love to us and to God's Word that we preached. He said that the 4 men who had killed the Boshesmen must be purified today, but that we Dutch people were people that prayed and the wind did blow away all our uncleanness.¹¹⁸

Mothibi affirms the customs of the BaTlhaping concerning cattle thieves, over against the attempts of missionary intervention. But he then uses the missionaries preaching, based on their Bible, to indicate that he recognises a resonance between the BaTlhaping custom of cleansing those who have taken life with the missionary notion of 'uncleanness', a common synonym for 'sin'. The missionaries can, he implies, participate in the cleansing component of the commando's activities by praying for them, so that the "wind" or 'spirit' (for the word used is the same in translation) would blow away their uncleanness. The very same 'spirit' that had been invoked in the church service, in the reading from John 14 (verses 16–17, 26), is now invoked by Mothibi, for his purposes. The BaTlhaping had been listening.

The "captains" of the BaTlhaping commandos indicate their support for Mothibi's position, and "with one voice were determined to show no mercy to the poor Boshesmen. They also said that we must by no means interfere with their government". Furthermore, to ensure that the missionaries did not interfere, the BaTlhaping formulated a new policy, making it clear that when in the future they "went on commando to take other peoples' cattle, we should

117 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 5–6.

118 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 6–7.

remain at home".¹¹⁹ Hamilton then laments to his implied interlocutors, "You will see by this that we have liberty only to preach the Gospel among them, and indeed this is all that the Great Master Christ hath laid upon us. And those that will be rulers and judges as well as preachers, it is no wonder that they bear a heavy Cross".¹²⁰ Struggling to make theological sense of these constraints, Hamilton reluctantly accepts a more limited notion of "the Gospel" than he would want. Hamilton recognises that Mothibi will not tolerate interference in "their government"; but he does not recognise that Mothibi has begun to interfere with the missionary interpretation of the Bible.

This is not the final word in Hamilton's report on this significant day. Hamilton watches as the five men who had killed the 'Bushmen' are cleansed, first eating of the ox which had been slaughtered on their behalf, and then going into seclusion to continue with the cleansing ceremony. He writes: "The day was devoted to public rejoicing".¹²¹

It is worth noting here that while the missionaries are willing to interfere with BaThlaping 'law' in cases such as commandos, they are unwilling to interfere in other areas. When Mothibi's senior wife, Mmahutu, had "complained much of the hard labour of the women in building houses and in digging the land, which took up all their time", saying "[s]he wished for a change that it might be as among the Dutch people, and then they would have time to come to Church", Hamilton replies, "We told her that in that we could not interfere".¹²² Again, we find this African woman reflecting on the change the missionaries might bring for African women, wondering about alternative ways of living.

Hamilton's report is replete with the rhythms of BaThlaping life, and soon the missionaries develop their own rhythms. Having noted that "[f]or sometime past almost no Bootchuannas come to Church",¹²³ "Sabbath" missionary work further afield becomes a central part of their rhythm, as they meet "to consider if nothing more could be done for the Salvation of the Bootchuannas", and agree "that one of us should go out every Sabbath morning to the Kraals that lay around the Town, who come not to Church, and preach to them"; they agree "also to pray" for the peoples further away. Keeping a record of this work, "written down in a Book for posterity", is also part of their rhythm.¹²⁴

119 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 7.

120 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 7.

121 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 7.

122 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 1.

123 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 9.

124 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 8.

Hamilton records many 'theological' conversations generated by their presence. Among the BaTlhaping, Mothibi's uncle, "Munaneets" or "Munameets" as Hamilton refers to him, is someone who engages often in this kind of discourse. During one such conversation "Munameets said that they had one great god and also little gods (meaning the rain makers); that they must both work together and help each other".¹²⁵ "We told him", says Hamilton, "that we did not wonder at them thinking so as they had been accustomed to think so from their childhood. But when God wrought in their hearts they would think otherwise". Another of the BaTlhaping leadership "was so affected with what was said about the Gods [sic]", Hamilton continues, "that he went to the Bush and prayed; that if we would not believe him he would show us the place".¹²⁶ In is not clear from such exchanges and the report of them how much Hamilton understands of the complex 'theological' exchanges that he participates in. Hamilton does not do much self-reflection in his writings, but he will be joined by another missionary in the years to come, Robert Moffat, who will devote considerable journal space to self-reflection on theological matters. But even Hamilton's theologically austere accounts offer us glimpses of the BaTlhaping as they explore the world that the Bible and missionary preaching is constructing among them.

The reference to "rain makers" is probably a misunderstanding on the part of Hamilton, for "Munameets" is referring to the ancestors in his reference to "little gods". But such is the awe associated with rainmakers,¹²⁷ and talk of rain is in the air at this time, that Hamilton's misunderstanding is understandable. When the rainmaker does arrive, he makes it clear to Mothibi that he should not have moved his settlement to accommodate the missionaries and that he should not "have Dutch people with him", expressing a commonly held fear among the many "nations" the rainmaker has visited that Mothibi was forming a military alliance with "the Dutch".¹²⁸

What strikes Hamilton about the rainmaker is "[h]ow ready are they to listen to man's words but how backward to the word of God".¹²⁹ Again, he does not recognise that the BaTlhaping are indeed listening to "the word of God", only not in a way he is familiar with. Significantly, when the rainmaker confronts Mothibi, saying "that the Dutch people who were with Mateebe hindred

125 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 9–10.

126 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 10.

127 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 206–213.

128 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 12.

129 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 12.

the rain by their using a whip and washing clothes”, which “caused the clouds to go away”, and urged “Mateebe to separate from them”, Hamilton comments that “I have no doubt but the greater part believed him, but no one said any of it to us. The Lord is King among the Heathen”.¹³⁰ While it is not that clear what Hamilton is referring to by ‘it’, he may mean that the missionaries are excluded from certain conversations, particularly when the BaTlhaping are attempting to hold together disparate but important relationships.

Mothibi has received the rainmaker with great deference and respect, offering him gifts worthy of his stature and power, but he is not willing to relinquish the potential power of the missionaries, which he is only beginning to probe and understand. In some respects the missionaries resemble the rainmakers of the region, coming from ‘outside’ the BaTlhaping community but offering additional resources to the BaTlhaping community. Only the month before the missionaries had received a letter from one of their number who had returned to Griqua Town telling of their safe return and including information that a ‘Bushmen’ and Griqua raiding party was planning to steal cattle from the BaTlhaping. Read conveyed this information to Mothibi, “who was highly pleased with Mr Anderson for letting him know”.¹³¹ The letter, first introduced to Mothibi by Campbell, now demonstrates its usefulness to the BaTlhaping, even though it is not addressed to them. Clearly there is much to probe and ponder here.

Indeed, the rainmaker himself, once the rains have begun to fall in late November and his presence has been vindicated, attends the church and tells the missionaries that his nation too “longed much for Missionaries”, and that he “was come to pray the Lord give rain to the Bootchuannas”.¹³² Just as the rainmaker makes a concession to the missionaries, attempting to find common religio-cultural ground, so too the missionaries make concessions to the BaTlhaping religio-cultural mores. When Read and Hendrik plan to hunt and explore “the place where the Bootchuanna dig the red Stone which they grind and rub their boys with [during circumcision]”, Mothibi “said they must not go there untill after harvest, as it was contrary to their laws, as it might cause Hail come [sic] and destroy their Corn. And hearing this they declined going”.¹³³

130 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 1. Hamilton starts a new section of his journal at this point, and begins numbering the pages from ‘1’ again.

131 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 10.

132 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 3.

133 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 3.

The forging of neo-indigenous and hybrid religio-cultural practice and reflection continues, so that when a woman “who had long been with Mr Read” is killed by lightning on the 25th December, the “Rain Maker” gave orders,

that no women must go to work at the land today, that no bushes must be cut, that the Clouds must have Medicine, or that they would kill more. The Rain Maker then went with the King and a great many men to bury the women killed by lightning. They went on with a long ceremony, first stabbing the ground with assagais, then burning bushes to make smoke for the clouds, then washing the body with water. They then suffered Mr Read to bury her in our way. This lasted about 5 hours.¹³⁴

A few months later, in February 1819, while Hamilton is travelling south to Griqua Town and then on to the Cradock River to meet up with his wife who is returning to the Kuruman after a long absence, he reflects more personally, something he does not often do in his letters. Away from the day-to-day rhythms of an emerging mission, he has time for reflection. Anxious about the safety of his wife and his own safety, he reflects theologically on God's promise of protection. The occasion is the fording of swollen rivers. As the wagons cautiously attempt to ford the swollen rivers he reflects: “When we were ready to go in, I thought on that promise, ‘When thou passeth through the water etc etc’. I believe that God was a promise performing God in Africa so well as in England”.¹³⁵ Hamilton appears to be grappling with whether God relocates and translates from one context to another, hoping that God indeed does.

When Hamilton and Hendrik arrive back at the Kuruman, Read too has returned from the south, and the news Hamilton has heard from his wife of Read's suspension is confirmed.¹³⁶ Theological reflection gives way to machinations about the management of mission.

Mr Read informed us that he had received letters from the Directors of the Missionary Society London informing him that on account of his fall they for the present did not consider him as one of their Missionaries. He wished to give up all the Management of outward things, which I requested him to hold untill a Director or Directors should come from England, which he consented too [sic]. I with the two Brethren at Griqua Town wished him for a time to give over dispensing Baptism, and the

¹³⁴ R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 5.

¹³⁵ R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 8.

¹³⁶ See R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 7.

Lord's Supper, and that his fall should be made publickly known before the Church, which he consented too.¹³⁷

On the last page of the journal, with no date, but following the entry for the 30th April 1819, Hamilton concludes: "So far at present".¹³⁸ So ends a year in the life of an ordinary lay missionary struggling to record and order, theologically, the work of mission among the BaTlhaping. But the BaTlhaping too are struggling to re-member and re-order. Against a background of internal missionary contestation, Mothibi intervenes. Having made it clear that the missionaries must not interfere in the ordering of BaTlhaping society, he now interferes, directly, in the ordering of the mission.

The Embroided Bible: Hamilton Manages the Mission

The latter half of 1819 and the first half of 1820 for the mission among the BaTlhaping are filled with missionary in-fighting. John Campbell, once again representing the directors of the Missionary Society, accompanied by John Philip, the newly appointed superintendent of the Missionary Society in Southern Africa, had arrived "as a Deputation of the Society to South Africa" at the Cape in February of 1819.¹³⁹ Having consolidated their relationship with "the Government" at the Cape, "the Deputation, accompanied by Mr. Moffat and Mr. Evans, Missionaries, left Cape Town for the interior, in the month of May".¹⁴⁰ However, "on account of the Caffre war, [the deputation] were unable to penetrate beyond the colony".¹⁴¹ It is noted that throughout the Colony the deputation "received the kindest reception from the Landdrosts and military

137 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 11.

138 R. Hamilton, Kuruman River, 17 April 1819, 12.

139 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 11, 1820," (London: The Missionary Society, 1820), 76.

140 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 77–78. It is important to mention Robert Moffat here for he would not only shape how the Missionary Society understood the missions in South Africa, he would shape the mission among the BaTlhaping.

141 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 78. Campbell's "severe disappointment" at not being permitted to proceed into the interior "was in no small degree abated, by the information which they had obtained from Mr. Moffat, by whom those stations [beyond the Colony] had recently been visited" (78).

officers, who not only behaved towards them with the greatest politeness and civility, but appeared to feel an interest in their [missionary] object".¹⁴² But all is not well at the Kuruman.

In a letter written from there on the 1st March 1820, Hamilton writes to the Missionary Society, saying, "I think it my duty to write to you although I receive no letters from the Directors or institutions how to act in this important Station".¹⁴³ The focus of the letter is the failure of Campbell and Philip to come to the Kuruman in 1819, as anticipated, "without writing to us".¹⁴⁴ Hamilton is worried that the fledgling congregation is being neglected. He had hoped that the deputation or an ordained missionary from nearby would administer the Lord's Supper. So eventually, on the 31st October 1819, "the Church feeling the want of that Holy ordnance", Hamilton asks Read, even though he has been suspended from administering holy communion. Read accepts, "stating that nothing but the cry of Christ's Sheep for Spiritual food could have induced him again to that Holy work". "From that day", comments Hamilton, "we as a Church of Christ have enjoyed that which is our right".¹⁴⁵ The letter has a militant tone, but Hamilton is careful to frame his 'disobedience' in terms that reflect the well-being of the mission. He continues,

We waited long for the coming of the Directors that they might have had the honour to have Baptised the first fruit of the Bootchuana, but they not coming B[rother] Read was prevailed on to do it. It was done on the 16 January 1820, in the Church in the presence of a great many Bootchuannas. Some laughed, and others look on with apparent concern. So far as we can judge, all the rest are still serving the god of this world, but show no enmity to the word.¹⁴⁶

In his journal for 1820, beginning in January of 1820, Hamilton had already expressed his sense of abandonment, stating that "[h]aving as yet received neither letters nor orders" from John Philip "to inform me to whom I am to

142 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 78.

143 R. Hamilton, Kuruman Latakkoo, 1 March 1820 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8A/1819-1820/2/A], 1.

144 R. Hamilton, Kuruman Latakkoo, 1 March 1820, 1.

145 R. Hamilton, Kuruman Latakkoo, 1 March 1820, 2.

146 R. Hamilton, Kuruman Latakkoo, 1 March 1820, 2-3.

send my Journal, I shall go on as formerly untill I receive further orders".¹⁴⁷ The journal also reflects, like the letter, that Read is involved in the work of the mission. Finally, however, Hamilton is summoned to Griqua Town to meet with Campbell and Moffat, who, "the formerly existing impediments being removed",¹⁴⁸ had set off for Griqua Town and the Kuruman on the 18th January 1820. Hamilton returns from Griqua Town with Campbell and Moffat, arriving at the Kuruman on the 25th March 1820. A few days after their arrival, on the 27th, "The case of B[rother] Read was taken into consideration. He was informed what was done at Bethelsdorp, that the Church had cut him off, that the Directors would Support and employ him, that he must go to Bethelsdorp and be received again by the Church, and then he should hear from Dr Philip what he was to do".¹⁴⁹

Rumours of Read's impending departure quickly reached the ears of the BaTlhaping leadership and then rumours of their response found their way to Hamilton, who "was informed [on the 29th] that the Bootchuanna Captains said that if B[rother] Read went away they would also remove the Town and no white man should again come near them". Hamilton passes the rumours on, saying, "I thought it my duty to inform Mr Campbell of what I had heard, which I did in the evening". Campbell's response, in Hamilton's words is "that we were not prisoners here, that what he did was according to the Command of Christ, and if we kept close to duty we had nothing to fear".¹⁵⁰ And though Campbell would reevaluate his opinion of Read, recognising that the hostility of some of the other white missionaries, including Moffat and Philip, towards Read was less to do with his extramarital affair and more to do with "his commitment to social equality" and "his style of missionary work".¹⁵¹ Campbell was also more pragmatic than he would let on to Hamilton, for when he travelled from "New Lattakoo" to "Old Lattakoo" (as Dithakong was known) during April, he was accompanied by Read, whose "services I found to be invaluable. His

147 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821 [Council for World Mission, South Africa, Journals, 1816–1824, Box 3, 75], 1.

148 Directors, "Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting of the Missionary Society," 80. Oddly, this report, in reporting on the various mission stations, including Kuruman, does not acknowledge Hamilton's earlier journal covering the period from April 1818 to April 1819, stating that, "All the information which the Directors are able to communicate respecting this station ["New Lattakoo"], in addition to what is contained in the last Report, is derived from a letter of Mr. Robert Moffat, who visited the place, in company of Mr. Anderson, in September 1818" (89).

149 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 4.

150 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 4.

151 Saunders, "James Read: Towards a Reassessment," 21.

residence at Lattakoo, his acquaintance with the manners and customs of the Bootshuanas, the individuals he had seen from the countries we desired to visit, and to whom he had shown kindness, pointed him out as the fittest person I could have chosen to accompany me on the present occasion".¹⁵²

But, as Hamilton records, Campbell is dismissive of the work Read and Hamilton and Hendrik have done at the Kuruman, for when Hamilton invites him "to administer the Lord's Supper to the Church here", on the 1st April, "He said the Church here was not orderly collected together. He did not reckon it a Church of Christ". Immediately following this remark, Hamilton adds that, "Besides the Missionaries all the member[s] were from the Churches of Bethelsdorp and Griqua Town, except one".¹⁵³ As already indicated, Hamilton does not often reflect openly or 'aloud' in his journal, but he does adopt a style in which juxtaposition creates its own discourse. Here he is implying that there is a link between Campbell's attitude and local African attendance at church by the BaTlhaping. In an entry on the 13th April this is clearly stated: "They [the BaTlhaping] had said that if B[rother] Read should be taken from then they would not come to Church".¹⁵⁴

When Read returns to the Kuruman from his travels further north with Campbell, the situation escalates. On the 10th May we hear, via Hamilton, of Chief Mothibi's position on Read's removal. "Today", writes Hamilton, marking the day clearly, "B[rother] Read informed Mateebe that he thought it his duty to go to the Colony, that it was his wish to return too, but that depended wholly on Mr Campbell". Giving Mothibi the most authoritative title bestowed by the missionaries, Hamilton continues, "The King said he had heard of his going but waited to hear it from him, that if he did not return he would remove the Town" from the Kuruman River. Prompted, perhaps, by Read, "The King said he would speak with Mr Campbell".¹⁵⁵

Mothibi waits until Campbell has returned from yet another exploratory visit. It becomes clear, as Hamilton informs Campbell on his return in July, "that the people were prohibited from coming to Church, [and] that messengers had been sent to call all the Captains to the meeting".¹⁵⁶ These rumours prompt Campbell to act, and so he invites Mothibi to come to Hamilton's

152 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in That Interior of That Country* (Two vols.; vol. 1; London: Francis Westley, 1822), 117–118.

153 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 4.

154 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 5.

155 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 7.

156 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

house “as he wanted to talk with him”. So as not to lose the initiative, Mothibi immediately informs Campbell “that he was just going to hold a general meeting of the people”.¹⁵⁷ The normally terse Hamilton offers an extended account of this encounter:

Mr Campbell asked him if the Missionaries had interfered in the concerns of his government, which they had promised not to do. Answered not at all, that they had behaved themselves well. The King then said he must not take away Mr Read as they considered him as their Father and could not think of parting with him. Mr Campbell said that he did not take him away, that he went away of himself. The King said that he had no objection to his going away to bring clothes and food if he would return. But he must return again or they would break up the Town, and go far up the country. He said that all others who might come must go further up the country, that Mr Campbell must do all in his power with the people in England that Mr Read might be sent back. When Mateebe had done speaking Munameets begged and prayed that Mr Read might be sent back.¹⁵⁸

A short while after this meeting in Hamilton's house, Mothibi asserts his authority: “the King sent for Mr Campbell to come” to the meeting Mothibi had called. When the missionaries arrive at Mothibi's meeting, Hamilton records, they find the BaTlhaping leadership “speaking in the strongest manner against Mr Read's leaving them. They said that all with one voice. Old and young, rich and poor entreated that he might be sent back”. Campbell's response, Hamilton continues, is to promise “to represent all to the Directors and people in England”.¹⁵⁹ But Mothibi does not let the matter rest with Campbell. When a deputation from the government visits Mothibi in August, representing the Governor of Cape Town, including the Landrost of Graaff-Reinet and accompanied by Moffat, Mothibi reiterates his request. The deputation has come to ask Mothibi to recall a commando, but Mothibi tells them it is too late to do this. But using the opportunity presented by their presence and their desire to form an alliance with his people, Mothibi presses his argument. When told by the Landrost that the gifts he has received were “sent to him from the Governor at Cape Town, because he had received and protected the Missionaries, that the Governor wanted to live in terms of friendship with him”, Mothibi responds,

¹⁵⁷ R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

¹⁵⁸ R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

¹⁵⁹ R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

writes Hamilton, “that he had one favour to ask him, that was to send back Mr Read if possible. If he came not back the Landrost would not find the Town here when he might return”. The Landrost, eager to placate Mothibi, “said that he saw no reason why he should have been taken away, that he would speak to him on the subject, that on the part of the Government there would be no hindrance”.¹⁶⁰

Mothibi astutely discerns the contours of power among the missionaries and colonial authorities. In his own way Hamilton does the same. In a letter to Campbell, perhaps keeping the pressure on Campbell to facilitate the return of Read, Hamilton elaborates on this incident, recording that Mothibi says that if Read does not return the Landrost “would not find the Town there when he might come again, that they would wait one year and if he came not they would go near to the Manneets [a neighbouring clan], that if Mr Read came not he would have no other white men with him”. When the Landrost assured Mothibi, Hamilton continues, that if Read did not return “others would be sent to him”, “the King replied that was true, but all were not alike”. He also said, says Hamilton, that Hamilton, Hendrik, and Moffat could only remain among the BaTlhaping “on the condition that Mr Read must be also”.¹⁶¹

And then in another letter, a very angry letter a few weeks later, Hamilton writes to the Directors of the Missionary Society, saying, “Since Mr Campbell’s departure I have thought that there was so much connected with his Mission to this place that it was my duty to let you know, as you are responsible along with the other Directors [‘members’ crossed out] of the Society for all that they have done”. He then goes on to say, “We had long expected the coming of Mr Campbell but little did we think that on his arrival we should have to say [citing a biblical reference, 1 Samuel 4:21] [‘]Ichabod [,] the glory is departed[’]. You will wonder how that came to pass. I shall endeavour to inform you”.¹⁶² What then follows is a more prosaic narrative of the above events. He warns the Directors not to take Mothibi’s threat of relocating “the Town”, nor to misinterpret such a relocation, saying,

You will perhaps hear of other causes for their removing the Town, but I can assure you that if he [Read] doth not come back that they are determined to remove the Town. This is only the work of three months and if

160 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 13.

161 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 15 August 1820 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8A/1819–1820/2/D], 1.

162 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 31 August 1820 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8A/1819–1820/], 1.

this takes place it will put an end to all Mr Campbell's projected Missions to the interior, as a bad report will be taken by the people of Mateebe that he hath run away from the Missionaries, and on that account no other Nation will receive them.¹⁶³

He then again reverts to rumour, continuing with his infrapolitical tactics,¹⁶⁴ saying that, "I have heard from a friend that the Directors of the Missionary Society have made up their minds not to receive Mr Read as a Missionary again. I hope they will think well what they are doing, only to please men. Of his repentance I have not the least doubt and I believe Mr Campbell is also satisfied with him, on that head".¹⁶⁵ Hamilton goes on to indicate that, "I shall advise him[,] Mr Read[,] to send the whole of his case to England that the publick may know the truth, and judge from the truth". But he saves his last word for the Directors: "If to please man the Directors suffer Mr Read not to return to Latakkoo, and the Bootchuannas run away from the Gospel and be eternally lost their souls[,] God will ask at your hands".¹⁶⁶ Hamilton is clearly very angry at the way in which internal mundane and personal rivalries have been allowed to determine the course of the eternal mission among the BaTlhaping.¹⁶⁷

The Eternal Bible: Hamilton's Message

But this is not the whole of Hamilton's analysis. In an earlier aside, commenting on Mothibi's determination to have Read remain or at least return, Hamilton adds, "I must confess, I felt much at this meeting for these poor heathen who put a higher esteem upon the Messengers than the message".¹⁶⁸ Important as Read is to Hamilton, the message is more important, and he regularly laments that the message, as proclaimed by the missionaries, is not being received. Earlier, at the end of his report on the month of June Hamilton laments: "Here another month is closed and every day the gospel hath been preached

163 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, New Latakkoo, 31 August 1820, 1.

164 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

165 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, New Latakkoo, 31 August 1820, 2–3.

166 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, New Latakkoo, 31 August 1820, 3.

167 He is also deeply hurt by Campbell's comments about the church at the Kuruman, that "he did not consider us a Church and could not sit down with us". He continues, "This hath discouraged us much, and I believe hath hurt the souls of many" (1).

168 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

according to the knowledge we have of the Scripture, but no one born again, no one crying out 'What must we do to be saved'. That is the work of God the Holy Ghost".¹⁶⁹ The Bible is the source of the message, and the missionaries are the proclaimers of the message, "according to the knowledge we have of the Scripture". Shortly the attention of the BaTlhaping will turn to separating the source from the message.

For now, later in July, on the 25th, Read departs in the company of Campbell and Moffat, leaving Hamilton to manage the mission with Jan Hendrik. Hamilton buys "a piece of land from . . . a Bootchuanna, for a Sheep",¹⁷⁰ Hendrik has a child baptised,¹⁷¹ and Anne Hamilton "began to keep School. She had the girls in my house and I the boys in Church. Many attended".¹⁷² The missionaries are settling in, but not the message. Month after month Hamilton's assessment is the same: "This month [October 1820] is past, the Gospel hath been preached but none hath accepted of a Saviour. They as yet see not their need of him".¹⁷³

The earlier inclusive interpretation of biblical texts now gives way to a more oppositional proclamation. During Campbell's visit, Campbell himself had preached on Matthew 24:14, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (NAS). And Hamilton preached on Luke 16:23, concerning "the rich man lifting up his eyes in Hell".¹⁷⁴ The logic of the message proclaimed by Hamilton is clear and concise: "of God's making the world and man, of the fall, and of the Love of God in sending Jesus to die for us, and save us from Hell".¹⁷⁵ On Sunday the 10th October 1820 Hamilton preaches on John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (NAS).¹⁷⁶

But it is not only the missionaries who are divided over against each other. The primary tension, from Hamilton's account, is whether or not to undertake "commandos". Those of Mothibi's people who have remained at Dithakong ("Old Latakkoo") and a number of other neighbouring allies are committed to regular commandos, involving cattle raiding or reprisals for cattle raids. Space in the interior was shrinking and becoming increasingly contested, and

169 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 8.

170 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 9.

171 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 1.

172 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 11.

173 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 15.

174 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 11.

175 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 14–15.

176 R. Hamilton, Burder's Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 15.

commandos were one way of securing space and cattle. Another way, a way Mothibi had been urged to follow by the missionaries and the colonial government, was to follow the way of “peace”.

Gleaning what he can of this contestation from those around him, Hamilton tries to reconstruct the contestation theologically. Having noted on the 1st December that there is “bad attendance at church and school”,¹⁷⁷ he then notes in his next entry, on the 8th December, juxtaposing these entries, that a neighbouring delegation visited Chief Mothibi, presenting him with an ox by way of invitation to join them on a commando against a people in the east. Mothibi responded, writes Hamilton, that they “must look to Latakkoo house (that was the Church), that since that was built they had given up all commandos, that they were taught to live in peace with all men, and that one of his Missionaries [ie. Read] was away, that he could not go on commando so long as he was absent, that he was glad that he [the neighbouring king] had sent the ox and he hoped they should live in peace”.¹⁷⁸

A few days later the conversation continues, as Mothibi’s calls a follow-up meeting to respond further to the invitation to participate in a commando. He reiterates, records Hamilton, eavesdropping on this exchange, that “God’s word taught them to give over commando and to live in peace with all men”. But Mothibi’s interlocutors are not persuaded by Mothibi’s ‘theological’ explanation. The “Captain who brought the message said it was not God’s word that hindered them but fear, as he saw that almost none of them went to hear that word”. Unable to refute this astute observation, Mothibi then shifts the focus of his argument, saying “that he had almost no men, as his Town was divided, that if it was true what the Dutch people said that there was a great fire [ie. hell], then those who went on commando were in a bad way. Another Captain said that god’s [sic] word was only among them in name, that not one had left any of their customs, all seemed to hold them fast”.¹⁷⁹

Mothibi acknowledges publically among his African interlocutors that ‘God’s word’ has had some effect, with the BaTlhaping divided on the social practice of commados. While not attending church, the BaTlhaping have been paying attention to what the missionaries say the Bible says. There is clearly ongoing debate among themselves, some of which Hamilton hears indirectly. Still on the outside listening in, another year of mission work comes to an end.

177 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 20.

178 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 20.

179 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, Near Latakkoo, 18 January 1821, 20.

The Disruptive Bible: An Unstable Interior

While Mothibi and the BaTlhaping are attempting to make sense of the power of the Bible to compel compliance with the threat of punishment of “a great fire”, they are also trying to make sense of the threat the missionaries themselves pose through their presence. For when in the early months of 1821 there is a significant period of drought, after good rains from October through early December, the rainmaker, “the people of Old Latakkoo”, “most of his people”, and Mothibi himself believed that “the Missionaries were the cause why the rain did not come”.¹⁸⁰ The debate about whether Mothibi should move his settlement away from the Kuruman River and the missionaries intensifies. Mothibi even threatens to move his settlement further to the north; and when Jan Hendrik says “that we should go with them”, Mothibi responds “that there was no water for us”.¹⁸¹

In the absence of Read (and Campbell and Moffat), Hamilton has gradually settled into the role of ‘missionary’. Indeed, in a letter written early in 1821, Hamilton styles himself as the apostle Paul, adopting the rhetoric of one of Paul’s letters: “Grace mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ”.¹⁸² However he readily admits that, “I have done all I could in preaching the Gospel in and around the Town”, but that “after all I must say that no man hath believed the report. I sometimes think that it is just as if we preached to the stones. They appear not to give it a single thought”.¹⁸³ He does not recognise or understand that the BaTlhaping are giving plenty of thought to the missionary presence, the missionary message, and the missionary brought Bible.

For Mothibi and the BaTlhaping the region has become increasingly volatile, with various groups moving across the territory traditionally controlled by them. Within and beyond the boundaries of the early Cape Colony African peoples had well established lines of relationship and routes for trade in material objects and ritual expertise.¹⁸⁴ Warfare, raiding, and the formation of

180 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 12 February 1821 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8B/1821–1822/3/A], 1.

181 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 12 February 1821, 2. The BaTlhaping recognised that the Europeans required more water than they themselves needed; see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 206–213.

182 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 12 February 1821, 1.

183 R. Hamilton, Burder’s Place, New Latakkoo, 12 February 1821, 2.

184 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 161–164.

external alliances and military pacts were a regular part of the rhythm of clan life for most African peoples in Southern Africa.¹⁸⁵ As we have noted, the first major area in which the colonial presence made itself felt beyond the borders of the Cape Colony in the early 1800s was predictably that of trade. The control of local African chiefs over the movement of persons and the exchange of products was increasingly impacted by, first, those groups (like the armed and mounted Griqua and Kora) who navigated the boundary of the Colony, serving those on either side and sustaining themselves in the process, and second, the increasing numbers of traders, travellers, explorers, missionaries and colonial functionaries who crossed (and so played a role in expanding) the colonial boundary.¹⁸⁶

But other forces were also at work in this period. Among these the most significant and historically controversial was the so-called *Mfecane* or *Difaqane*. The rise of Shaka and the expansion of the Zulu state in the eastern region of Southern Africa,¹⁸⁷ the resistance of African chiefdoms to the efforts of the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay who were pushing south in the search for slaves, and raiding parties of Griquas and Bergenaars from the south to meet the demand for bonded labour in the Cape Colony set up a series of chain reactions among neighbouring clans.¹⁸⁸ Within these socio-political upheavals, and contributing to them, the emergent Boer republics were extending their control over indigenous populations “by asserting their sovereign capacity to impose taxation, to regulate land and movement, and to extract labor”; “settler

185 Legassick, “The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800,” in *African Societies in Southern Africa: Historical Studies* (ed. Thompson; London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969); Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 164–165.

186 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 165–166.

187 See John Moffat’s account of Shaka’s role; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat, by Their Son, John S. Moffat* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1885), 109–110.

188 Cobbing, “The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo,” *Journal of African History* 29 (1988); Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 167–169. See also Hamilton, “The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History,” (Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg: Witwatersrand University Press and University of Natal Press, 1995); Wright, *John Wright: Imfecane?* (Ben Khumalo-Seegelken, 1995 [cited 8 August 2015], available from <http://www.benkhumalo-seegelken.de/suedafrika-texte/1007-john-wright-imfecane/>).

colonialism was taking its intrusive place",¹⁸⁹ "casting their political and economic net over the interior".¹⁹⁰

Mothibi and the BaTlhaping were having to navigate and negotiate with this rapidly changing context. And while Mothibi (and those among the BaTlhaping leadership like "Munameets" and Mmahutu) sought to retain a hold on the missionaries as a way of having access to European information and reconnaissance, as well as European rifles and gunpowder, in addition to the more 'traditional' items of trade, Mothibi was forced by "most of his people" to recognise that the missionaries might disrupt the integrity of the BaTlhaping social order. This became increasingly clear with the arrival of Robert Moffat, who was far more intrusive than Read and Hamilton, "determined to establish a community independent from Tswana society".¹⁹¹

James Read, Mothibi's talisman among the missionaries, had not returned. Moffat had taken charge of the missionary project in Kuruman from the 17th May 1821. Moffat was dismissive of most of the mission work he found, including the work of Read, Hamilton, and Hendrik at the Kuruman. Within weeks of his arrival, "in an operation which his son later described admiringly as 'wielding the pruning knife', 'a course of stern discipline had purged the little community, and though the band that met around the Lord's table was reduced to a mere fraction, yet it was a lesson to heathen onlookers that must have told its tale'".¹⁹²

Both Mothibi and Hamilton understood this tale. Hamilton had more limited options than Mothibi, choosing to remain with Moffat even when his wife and children left because of conflicts with Moffat, in October of 1823, making it clear in a letter to John Philip that, "You must not think from what I wrote that I wish to be separated from Mr Moffat, no".¹⁹³ But he does withdraw into the background of the mission work, with Moffat now the figure-head and the primary correspondent, though Hamilton does continue to send occasional letters.

189 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 278.

190 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 196–197.

191 Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier*, 50; see also 50–56. See also du Bruyn, *Die Aanvangsjare Van Dir Christelike Sending Onder Die Tlhaping, 1800–1825*, 67–91.

192 Schoeman, *The Early Mission in South Africa*, 155.

193 R. Hamilton, New Lattakoo, 17 February 1823 [CWM/LMS/Africa/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box9/1823–1825/1/B], 4.

The Observed Bible: The African Gaze

It is in such a letter that we observe the Bible being observed by Africans in a new way. In March of 1824 Hamilton undertakes a journey to “the Baralong Town”, the settlement of a related neighbouring clan. He was, he says, “determined to undertake a journey, as spie, to ascertain the truth” of rumours about marauding “nations” in the area. Hamilton hears from the local chief he is visiting that though the chief anticipated these marauders would perhaps come to his town, he did not think they would attack the BaTlhaping “as they are much afraid of the Dutch people’s muskets”, for “much of their fighting is by throwing stones”.¹⁹⁴ While among the Barolong he preaches “by the consent & in the presence of the chief” from John 3:16 “to about 1000 heathen who assembled according to the orders of the chief”.¹⁹⁵ On the 27th March, it being the Sunday, even though he laments that the Sabbath is unknown among these people, he holds a morning service: “Orders were again issued to assemble the people; a great concourse attended and I was called to stand by the chief. I preached from 2 v 38 Acts [?] & good order was again observed”.¹⁹⁶

What follows is significant, for “[a]fter worship the chief Captain asked to see the Bible. I was requested to lay it on the ground before him, and it was admired by all for a long time. I thought what would their wonder be if they knew its contents!”.¹⁹⁷ Hamilton’s letter is smudged where the biblical text is cited, so it may not be a reference to the book of Acts, though this is the most probable reference. If it is, those listening would have heard: “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38, NAS). This is normal missionary proclamation, echoing the biblical texts we have noted being used on other occasions. What is it that draws forth this response? It is not clear, though it may be the reference to the “Holy Spirit”, a form of spiritual power that would later become a core component and presence within every variety of African Christianity.¹⁹⁸ What is clear from

194 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824, 2.

195 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824, 2.

196 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824, 3.

197 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824, 3. N. Raphahlela informs me that his mother, who is from among the Southern Tswana, remembers a traditional practice in which visitors were expected to place their gifts on the ground before those who received them.

198 For an example of research from among these people see Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

this strange request is that these Africans do not want to handle the text themselves, yet. However, they also do not want Hamilton to continue to hold it. They want to observe or “admire” it on its own, separated from the one who brought it among them. And this they do “for a long time”.

Hamilton reflects on “what would their wonder be if they knew its contents”, but he does not reflect on what they might be wondering about the Bible. This is not an isolated incident. Later in the day, when he has returned from preaching in another “division” of the settlement, the chief “sent to me to come & tell him & his people the good news once more before I left them & I told him that it afforded me much pleasure to receive that request from him”. Hamilton then describes how,

The people came in great numbers & and continued to do so till worship was almost ended. The subject of discourse was the power of Christ in raising Lazarus from the tomb. Service being ended the King as in the forenoon asked for the Bible, which was again laid on the ground and gazed at with wonder for a considerable time.¹⁹⁹

Here is a sign that the Bible is beginning to be seen as distinct from the missionaries. And while the Batswana peoples, including the BaTlhaping and the Barolong, for now have to rely on the missionaries in order to have access to “its [the Bible’s] contents”, they will not have to wait that much longer in order to have direct access to a Bible in their own language.

We are fortunate to have Hamilton’s account of these African requests, for in the next chapter we focus on Robert Moffat’s record. Moffat was less amenable to requests like this and would almost certainly have dismissed both the requests and the incidents themselves, eliding them from the missionary record. But Hamilton was more compliant, in some respects, having been influenced by Read’s more inclusive theology of mission. So he places the Bible on African ground and steps away, allowing the African gaze to have its way.

199 R. Hamilton, New Latakoo, 12 April 1824, 3.

The Translated Bible

the people we should send . . . would change the Bible from our language into theirs.¹

When John Campbell visits the BaTlhaping and neighbouring peoples in 1820, a second journey undertaken at the request of the London Missionary Society, he sits down in “the king’s house” and engages in a long conversation, which “were taken down verbatim, at the time”.² Through the transcribed conversation Campbell is attempting to ascertain and record the impact of the missionary presence among the BaTlhaping. Campbell’s opening question, on the morning of the 29th March, is if Mothibi “considered it a favor done to him and his people, that Missionaries had been sent . . . to instruct him and them in the knowledge of those things of which they were before ignorant?” Refusing to be drawn on their alleged ignorance, Mothibi replies, “it is good they came—those of our people who would not leave Old Lattakoo, to accompany us to the Krooman, said to us, “the Missionaries will make you their servants””. Mothibi makes it clear, from the outset, that the BaTlhaping have not become servants to the missionaries, as some of his people claimed they would. But Mothibi recognises that Campbell wants some acknowledgement of missionary induced change. So he continues. “Then”, writes Campbell, “as proof that he and his people had paid some attention to the teachings of the Missionaries, he added, ‘We disapprove of bad things, of commandos’”.³

Mothibi’s choice of the term ‘bad’ (via translation) suggests that he recognises that Campbell is engaged in a theological conversation. This becomes even clearer when Campbell continues, asking, “Does Mateebe think any of his people are happier or better, by the things which the Missionaries have told them?” Mothibi replies, “All are pleased with the Word, but we cannot comprehend it, we are glad we have the means of knowing it; we can now sleep well.”⁴ What is not clear is whether Mothibi is referring here only to the

1 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in That Interior of That Country* (Two vols.; vol. 1; London: Francis Westley, 1822), 192.

2 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. I, 77, 81.

3 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. I, 77.

4 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. I, 77.

proclaimed 'Word' or the written 'Word' as well. Campbell, as we have noted, has placed particular emphasis on the Bible, the yet to be (but promised) translated 'Word', so Mothibi may be making reference to the Bible's presence.

Campbell continues, worrying that Mothibi is simply being pragmatic about the missionary presence. "Can Mateebe tell what causes them to sleep so well? Is it, because they now know something of the true God, or because white men with guns now live among them?" Mothibi replies, carefully, not wanting to alienate the missionaries, "A peace from God, and by the word coming among us." Not convinced that Mothibi does "know something of the true God" or of "the word", Campbell urges Mothibi to do as those in time of Jesus did when they "did not understand the meaning of what he said", they came and "requested him [Jesus] to explain it to them", and the BaTlhaping "should do the same to the Missionaries". Mothibi's reply to this is somewhat ambivalent, saying "That ought to be so; but the Griquas once did not understand—now they are changed. I hope it will be so with us".⁵ It is not clear from this enigmatic response what kind of change the Griquas have undergone. From his earlier response it would be unlikely that he hopes for a situation in which the BaTlhaping serve the missionaries or change their customs to conform to the missionaries. He may be referring to translation and reading of the Bible.

That the conversation may be about the Bible becomes clearer as Campbell continues, asking Mothibi, "Does Mateebe now understand how a book can speak, better than he did when I endeavoured to explain it on my former visit?" Mothibi's response is instructive, illustrating that he is more interested in the 'how' than the 'what' of the Bible. "I do not yet understand how the Bible speaks, nor how a letter tells about things which happen far off".⁶ Mothibi is here quite clear about his primary area of interest with respect to the Bible and the letter, and by linking the two as the missionaries had, Mothibi demonstrates how attentive the BaTlhaping have been to the details of the missionary presence among them. What interests Mothibi in particular is being able to activate the Bible and the letter, as the missionaries do. He is not that interested in what the missionaries teach, though he does grapple with aspects of what he has heard, trying to find lines of connection with his own traditions.

In this chapter we remain once again among the BaTlhaping, watching with them as the missionaries learn their language, teach them to read, and begin to translate parts of the Bible into their language. Just as Mothibi would prefer to hold and fire his own gun rather than be beholden to the missionary held

5 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. I, 77–78.

6 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. I, 78.

gun, so too he would prefer to hold, read, and 'interpret' (have access to) the Bible for himself.

The Theological Bible: Moffat's Message

Mothibi would have to wait for a considerable time before the Bible, or even portions of the Bible, were translated into his own language. Envisioned by Campbell, it was Robert Moffat who would endeavour to complete this task. Having displaced James Read, though Read would hover in the background and continue to haunt Moffat,⁷ Moffat took control of the mission project among the BaTlhaping. As with the tenure of Read, however, it was Robert Hamilton who did much of the day-to-day work around the mission,⁸ particularly during the numerous periods when Moffat was away, either venturing further into the interior or maintaining the lines of connection with the Colony. Much as Moffat respected Hamilton,⁹ when it came to the key task of translation, Hamilton appears not to have played much of a role. As John Moffat, Moffat's son, informs us, reflecting on the year 1837, "the largest share of duty" in the work of the mission in general and in the task of translation in particular, 'fell upon' Robert Moffat, "from his more complete mastery of the Sechwana language, and his personal ascendancy over men". Robert Hamilton, we are told, "though well stricken in years, and never able to acquire the Sechwana language, quietly went about his daily labour in the mechanical department of the mission, supplementing in Dutch, by the aid of a native interpreter, the preaching of his colleagues [Moffat and Roger Edwards] when necessary".¹⁰

Moffat's letters, journals, and books provide his account of the translation project.¹¹ What is clear throughout is that Moffat is translating 'the message'

7 See Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: Being the Journals and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820–1828* (ed. Schapera; London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), 9, 59, 69, 192.

8 See Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 9. Read left Dithakong in July 1820, accompanying Campbell and Moffat on their return to Griqua Town; Hamilton remained behind, and was joined by Moffat in May 1821. See also John Moffat's reflections; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat, by Their Son, John S. Moffat* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1885), 80, 86, 120, 128, 180.

9 See for example his letter to the Directors in February 1844, as he sums up Hamilton's tenure; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 246–267.

10 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 213.

11 For a summary version see Bradlow, *Printing for Africa: The Story of Robert Moffat and the Kuruman Press* (Kuruman: Kuruman Moffat Mission Trust, 1987), 1–10. For an overview of a reconstruction of Moffat's correspondence see the "Introduction" by I. Schapera

of the Bible. On the first page of the “Preface” to his book *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, Moffat reflects on how his “record of events” in Southern Africa relates to “the philosophy of missions” in general. He asserts that his book “will . . . show that, amid circumstantial differences, there is a radical identity in the operations of human depravity, in Asia, in Polynesia, and in Africa; and that while the Gospel is the only, it is also the uniform, remedy for the distress of a world convulsed by sin, and writhing with anguish”.¹² It is not so much the Bible (that is, the particular texts of the Bible) which is being translated as it is the core message of the Bible (that is, ‘the Gospel’). The translation project is, for Moffat, a theological project. He is not offering the BaTlhapang access to the Bible on its own terms (and theirs), he is translating ‘the’ message for them.

These missionaries had always conceived of the work of translation as a form of proclamation of ‘the message’. For example, in the 1818 annual report of The Missionary Society it is reported that “the Missionaries have begun to compile a dictionary and catechism in the Bootsuanna language”.¹³ Here there is a direct relationship between translation and the catechism, the primary tool of instruction for new converts. However, in the 1819 annual report, there are indications that there is a recognition that the translation of the Bible requires more than theological acumen and orthodoxy. Having noted that the “mechanical labours Mr Hamilton had been so unremitted, as to prevent him from devoting much time to the acquisition of the language”, the report goes on to stress the importance of translation:

As, however, it appeared of great importance to the success of the mission, that books in the Bootchuana tongue should be provided, it was in contemplation by the Brethren at this station, to request the services

in Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, xi–xxix. What follows in this chapter is the longer slower version. For an analysis of what would become “an established literary genre” by the late nineteenth century see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 172–178. And for a specific analysis of Moffat’s *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (1842) see de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 142–162.

12 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), v.

13 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fourth General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 14, 1818,” (London: The Missionary Society, 1818), 33. It is also reported that, “The printing press for Lattakoo is arrived at Griqua Town”, and that, “We hope ere long to hear that reading, writing, and printing have been commenced at Lattakoo” (33).

of Mr. Helm, of Griqua Town, whose acquaintance with the original Scriptures, and progress in the Bootchuana, would soon enable him to prepare for the press portions of the Bible in that language.¹⁴

The brethren referred to would have included, formally, Hamilton and Jan Hendrik (“native”),¹⁵ as well as the effaced Read. Read’s relative recognition of and openness to the perspectives of the BaTlhaping may have enabled him to understand the importance of a translation of the Bible that was not overtly theologically driven. What the BaTlhaping got, however, was not Helm but Moffat, who had limited formal biblical and theological training.¹⁶ What he did have, however, was a definitive view on the Bible’s theological message.

But before we come to Moffat’s tenure among the Southern Tswana of the Southern African interior, we should note that translation too had preceded him. As Frank Bradlow reminds us, “On 17 February 1816, almost a year before Robert Moffat arrived in South Africa on 17 January 1817, another missionary the Rev. John Evans had arrived in Lattakoo with the first party of missionaries”.¹⁷ Evans was well equipped with the linguistic training required to undertake translation work, including “some progress in Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, and Persian”.¹⁸ However, after a mere nine months at Dithakong, Evans wrote to the Directors of the London Missionary Society, on 7 November 1816, declining to remain, enumerating his reasons for resignation as follows:

1. Impossibility of arranging their rude speech into a proper form for to bear a translation of the Sacred Volume in my lifetime. But should they be civilized heathen and had a constructed language of their own I should not have resigned it for the whole world.
2. I am unable to adjust myself in outward circumstances and therefore one of the most unsuitable persons to remain among savages.
3. I want to be a means of converting souls[.]¹⁹

14 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fifth General Meeting of the Missionary Society, Usually Called the London Missionary Society, on Thursday, May 13, 1819,” (London: The Missionary Society, 1819), 77. Note the shifting orthography for “Bootchuana” between the two reports.

15 Directors, “Report of the Directors to the Twenty-Fifth General Meeting of the Missionary Society,” 143.

16 Lubbe, “‘By Patience, Labour and Prayer. The Voice of the Unseen God in the Language of Bechuana Nation’. A Reflection on the History of Robert Moffat’s Setswana Bible (1857),” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 12 (2009): 19–20; Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 5–6.

17 Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 7.

18 Cited in Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 7.

19 Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 8.

Moffat was also not the first to print books in the Setswana languages. As early as 1819, Henry Helm, a missionary based in Griqua Town, apparently ‘dabbled’ in printing.²⁰ It also appears that James Read, carefully effaced from the missionary record at this point, produced, in his words, “a vocabulary of words and formed a spelling book which Mr Helm printed, but as yet is little used”.²¹ It is likely, therefore, that Moffat’s “Spelling Book”, published in 1826 was based on Read’s early work, though this is not acknowledged, neither by Moffat nor the London Missionary Society.²²

Which brings us to Robert Moffat. Among the things Moffat does on his first day in charge at “New Lattakoo” (Maruping) is to restructure the day. Hamilton proposes and Moffat agrees to “the giving up of the [daily] evening service . . . for the following reasons: 1st., because few or no Bootchuanas came in the evening; 2nd., Br. H. should have a more suitable time to keep school; and 3rd., I should have the best part of the day for acquiring the language”.²³ Though the discipline of “acquiring the language” would prove more difficult to maintain than Moffat imagines, we see that he is focussed, at the outset, on the task of translation. In the same journal entry (18th May 1821) he also records how Sunday’s are to be restructured, basing his argument on his reluctance to be dependent on the translation of others and his distinction between the “meat” and the “milk” of God’s word:

We also appointed that, every Sabbath evening, service should be held without an interpreter, exclusively for the members of the Church and others who may understand Dutch. This last measure we deemed of essential importance for the welfare of the cause in building up and establishing the Hottentot believers, to whom strong meat should be given and not milk, [they] being no more babies. This measure is also of greater importance to the missionaries themselves, who are accustomed to study and preach on little more than the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, for alas! the Bootchuanas have not learned these.²⁴

20 Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 9.

21 Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 9.

22 Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 9–10. What was the ‘Missionary Society’ became the ‘London Missionary Society’ in 1818.

23 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 18. Though the missionaries give up the evening service, they do continue with a regular “English prayer meeting” in the evening (20).

24 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 18.

Having identified and divided his different constituencies, Moffat goes on explain to his implied reader that each of these constituencies requires a different set of theological instruction. “Under such circumstances”, Moffat continues, “the soul either loses a relish for stronger food, or finds itself impoverished for want of more knowledge and more enlarged views of the doctrine of the Cross, the Christian warfare, etc.”.²⁵ And at the last evening service on that Monday evening, as Moffat notes without a break in his journal entry, “I preached from John v.39, ‘Search the scriptures’”.²⁶ This biblical text (John 5:39) is part of a section (John 5:19–47) in which Jesus is contending with the Jewish religious leadership, saying, “‘Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life’” (KJV). Moffat locates himself and the fledgling church at “New Lattakoo” within a similar kind of contestation, or, to use Moffat’s words, “Christian warfare”. He also asserts that the primary message of the Bible is Christological, it is about Christ, emphasising as he states earlier “the doctrine of the Cross”. “The Cross”, as will become apparent to those to whom he regularly preaches, is central to Moffat’s understanding of “Christian warfare”.

Moffat sees himself as surrounded by both internal and external forces that need to be engaged in “Christian warfare”. He was, in the words of his son many years later, “both able and willing to wield the pruning-knife with a strong and skilful hand”, so that in a few months after his arrival at the mission “a course of stern discipline had purged the little community”, a lesson both to mission insiders and “a lesson to heathen onlookers”.²⁷ On Sunday 29th July, for example, Moffat reports, “This evening I preached on the nature and order of a Christian church”. “This I did”, he goes on to explain, “to prepare the minds of the members for the exercising [of] Church discipline”.²⁸ Having preached on this subject, no doubt using a biblical text (though a scripture citation is not given), the next few weeks are filled, in the journal, with particular cases. On Tuesday the 31st July, for example, “one of the members” of the church “was suspended for public misconduct”.²⁹ And when Moffat looks at the outcome of his “Church discipline being exercised according to the example of the ancient

25 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 18–19.

26 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 19.

27 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 101.

28 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 20. Moffat saw himself doing what “Paul [the apostle] would have done had he been here”; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 95.

29 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 20.

Church”³⁰ a week later (the only source of which would have been the Bible), there are only twelve at the Sunday evening service to whom he “administered the Lord’s supper”.³¹ Reflecting on this small number, Moffat comments: “I believe it was a season of refreshing”.³²

Moffat then goes on, immediately, to reflect on the failure of the mission with respect to “the Bootchuana”. While Moffat believes that exercising church discipline on those within the church signals “a season of refreshing”, he admits that “[i]t is, however, painful to reflect that there is not one Bootchuana converted to the faith of the Gospel. This is one of the trails of missionary life, to labour without fruit. This Mission has hitherto met with no success after a course of years’ labour”.³³ Anticipating some confusion on the part of his readers, who had received reports of the first convert among the BaTlhapeng, a young woman who was blind,³⁴ Moffat proceeds to offer his assessment of this conversion:

A blind Bootchuana girl has been baptized since the Mission commenced, but there is reason to fear that the loaves [of bread] have influenced her to embrace Christianity. She found that the missionaries, like the kings of Israel, were merciful. She, having no home, found one in the Mission, but her knowledge is so erroneous and superficial, that it seems hardly scriptural to believe the extent of her knowledge is capable of changing the heart.³⁵

According to Moffat it is particular biblical knowledge (within a given theological shape) that has the capacity to change the heart, and he sees his primary task as proclaiming this knowledge or message or Gospel. Because there is a direct relationship between theological knowledge and conversion, it is possible, Moffat believes, to test the conversion by testing the theological knowledge. So in addition to preaching, Moffat devotes considerable time to enquiry and argument, lamenting: “How difficult to promote the spirit of religious

30 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 20.

31 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 21.

32 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 21.

33 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 21.

34 A. Hamilton, Croomen River, 6 March 1820 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8A/1819–1820/2/A]; R. Hamilton, Kuruman Latakkoo, 1 March 1820 [CWM/LMS/South Africa/Incoming correspondence/Box 8A/1819–1820/2/A], 2–3.

35 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 21. Once again, it is not incidental that it is an African woman who seeks out and finds a place in another way of life, notwithstanding its many ambiguities.

enquiry, that people may judge for themselves! Very few arguments are necessary to silence the heathen in these quarters, and we are only sorry that they neither propose questions nor raise objections".³⁶

Moffat misses or dismisses the arguments that are being made by his hosts. When local BaTlhaping and the visiting rainmaker attend a Sunday service (on the 23rd September 1821), the rainmaker is questioned after the service. "[H]e was asked by one how it happened that no more rain fell. He answered, with the greatest seriousness, that the cause of the rain not falling was on account of an old woman who had died in the town just when the rain commenced". Having offered an argument that made sense within his own world-view, but which is not understood or accepted by the missionaries, the rainmaker is then asked to explain again, this time within the world-view of the missionaries. "When asked what influence her death had on the clouds, he gave an evasive answer".³⁷ That evening Moffat takes the opportunity offered by this exchange to preach from Psalm 97:2, "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (KJV). In his journal he explains his choice of biblical text: "I chose this text with a view to exhibit the righteousness and judgement of Jehovah in all his dealings with man, even though a dark providence intervene".³⁸

Though the reference to "clouds and darkness" is probably not associated with "a dark providence", there are elements in the Psalm that Moffat draws on, including a reference in verse 3: "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about" (KJV). More directly relevant to his argument with the rainmaker are verses 6–7: "The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods" (KJV). For Moffat, the clouds represent both his understanding of God's provision and his emerging modern understanding of meteorology, both of which are considered superior to the understanding of the rainmaker. For Moffat, "Christian warfare" requires that the knowledge of the rainmaker must be contested.

A few days later, Moffat is requested by Mothibi "in a very formal way" to 'attend' a gravely ill relative. Mothibi explains to Moffat that, "Delewing, a wife of Bromella, a respectable chief", had quite suddenly become very ill. "On enquiry", Moffat "found that they supposed, yea firmly believed, her to be bewitched by a woman who had during the night laid the hand on her neck". Mothibi elaborates on his understanding of bewitchment, saying "that

36 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 24.

37 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 24–25.

38 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25.

his family was an unfortunate one”, as “Mahooto his wife had just recovered from a severe sickness”, and now “Delewing . . . a relation of his”, “was on the point of dying”.³⁹ Moffat immediately “embraced this favourable opportunity of explaining to him the inconsistency of such a faith”.⁴⁰

I turned his attention to the Holy Scriptures as the criterion by which we must think, speak, and act; that peace and resignation were the fruits of sincere obedience to that unerring rule; that the word of God assured us that life and health were at the disposal of their author, and that sorcery and witchcraft were nothing more than names, the fruit of imagination, which were the cause of much mischief in putting to death, as the Bootchuanas do, persons who, they ignorantly suppose, possess such power, by which means innocent blood is shed and they who survive no less than murderers.⁴¹

While it is not clear from the single long sentence cited how much of this was addressed to Mothibi and how much to his European readers, Moffat goes on to record Mothibi's response, again with commentary. “To what I said”, says Moffat, “Matebee made little or no answer, except that as I was a doctor, as they suppose me to be, I surely must know”.⁴² Fulfilling Mothibi's supposition that Moffat is indeed a doctor, an *ngaka*,⁴³ Moffat accompanies Mothibi and offers his own ‘sorcery’,⁴⁴ first examining her, then bleeding her, and then giving her “some diluting drink”.⁴⁵ The next day, finding her a “little better”, Moffat gives her “some medicine”. Later in the day he again visits his patient. As with each of the previous two visits he stops the BaTlhaping women who are caring for “Delewing” from offering their own remedies, including the use of medicinal

39 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25.

40 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25.

41 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25.

42 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25.

43 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1991), 55–60.

44 This was a period in which “Western ways of curing changed profoundly, . . . and did so in a manner that had major effects on the mission”; see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 325, 323–364.

45 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 25–26.

smoke and bleeding.⁴⁶ On this third visit, he “gave her some diluting drink, and bathed her feet in warm water”.⁴⁷

Most importantly, from Moffat’s perspective, he uses the opportunity of this woman’s gradual recovery during the day to instruct, theologically, the women “attendants, who were not a few, and who had borne the look of sadness”, and who “now seemed quite overjoyed”: “I conversed some time with them on death and immortality, and the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ, in order to escape the punishment due for sin and obtain an everlasting salvation”. Moffat observes that, “They paid considerable attention, and urged many excuses for their absence from church”.⁴⁸ Failing to recognise the similarities between his medicine and theirs, Moffat focusses on the distinctive religio-cultural frames within which healing is understood, though it is clear the neither dialogue partner understands the frame of the other.

On the Sunday following this contestation concerning religio-cultural healing frameworks, there is a marked increase in church attendance. But Moffat is not impressed, for he does not consider that what is being preached is being attended to: “The attendance at church seems rather on the increase, though comparatively little attention is paid to what is preached”.⁴⁹ BaTlhaping attendance, Moffat assesses, is pragmatic. Access to another *ngaka* is a significant factor in BaTlhaping assessments of the missionary presence, and somehow the Bible and the church are closely related to Moffat’s prowess as a “doctor”.⁵⁰

Moffat is not entirely dismissive of pragmatic attendance, for as he goes on to comment, “It is, however, very pleasing to see them within reach of the Gospel net”.⁵¹ Moreover, Moffat continues, demonstrating his own pragmatism, by attending church the BaTlhaping “give by so doing a partial approbation to

46 It is not clear from the account whether the bleeding done by the BaTlhaping women is an imitation of Moffat’s earlier bleeding or a distinctive local form of bleeding. What is clear is that Moffat “just arrived in time to prevent it” (26).

47 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 26.

48 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 26. Moffat notes a few weeks later that “Delewing, who was so extremely ill, seems nearly recovered. She has more than once attended the church. She seems to be a thinking woman, of whom one would desire to entertain hope” (27).

49 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 26.

50 This was a time when “Western ways of curing changed profoundly”, with biomedicine slowly eclipsing, for the missionaries, religio-cultural notions of healing; Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 325. In 1835 the mission station at Kuruman would receive a forerunner of ‘modern’ medicine, Andrew Smit; see Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 184–185.

51 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 26.

our remaining among them". Immediately, however, he adds, "though they care little about our going and staying. Many would regret were we to go, merely from their love to tobacco, which they get now and then from some of us".⁵²

Moffat is extremely uncomfortable with being associated with gift-giving or trade.⁵³ He dismisses "[t]he affections which the Bootchuanas had to Mr. R[ead]" as 'originating' "in the favours he had done them", and adds that in his assessment "it is our general opinion that it is a happy thing, both for the Mission and the cause, that Mr. R. is gone".⁵⁴ Yet he recognises the necessity of using missionary brought goods to 'collect together' those who would not otherwise pay any attention to the missionary message. Speaking about establishing a mission station among the "Bushmen", Moffat comments that "the character of the Bushmen . . . is such as renders the collecting of them together to be almost impossible without much trouble and expense. All the world will not induce them to associate except for belly. At present meat and tobacco are their gods, and without them, all the learning of Athens will not persuade them to remove a peg from their old course".⁵⁵ He then critiques John Campbell for asserting, in commenting on the mission among the "Bushmen", that "Paul never gave tobacco".⁵⁶ Yet, with respect to the BaTlhaping, Moffat wishes that Campbell's advice had "been written on brass and given to the missionaries who were sent to Lattakoo,⁵⁷ instead of the abundant services they were commanded to do for the Bootchuanas, a nation rich and independent".⁵⁸ Campbell is at fault, as was Read, according to Moffat, for not being able to discern what forms missionary pragmatism ought to take among particular African peoples.

The following "Sabbath", the 7th October, Moffat returns to the theme of sin, preaching on 1 John 1:9, "If we confess, etc.": "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (verses 9–10, KJV). Worried, perhaps, that his being considered a "doctor" by the BaTlhaping may deflect them from the theological information he

52 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 26.

53 Moffat will himself become the object of "some calumnious reports", whereby he is accused of engaging in trade for his own personal gain; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 135–136.

54 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 9.

55 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 19.

56 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 19.

57 This is another jibe at Read.

58 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 20.

wants them to understand, he insists on reminding them of their sinful religio-cultural state.

Though Moffat does not here openly acknowledge or perhaps understand the significance of being considered a “doctor”, in his more reflective writings on his missionary work he seems to have some understanding of the religio-cultural framework within which he is being apprehended. While on a visit to a neighbouring clan some years later, setting out in July 1824, Moffat spends “a profitable Sabbath” in “the wilderness” ‘conversing’ with his “Bechuana” companions. He begins by making “many inquiries to discover if they had any sense of moral evil”, adding that “it was with great difficulty I could convey to their understanding what I meant to say. They assured me again and again, that they could not comprehend that there was evil in any thing they could do”.⁵⁹

Moffat then shifts his focus to ‘sin’. He has by this time found a Setswana word that might carry the burden of this central theological concept: “The term *boleo*, (sin,) did not convey to them the same meaning it does to us; they applied it to a weapon, or any thing else which they thought was not made as they wished. Thus, what we should call an imperfect knife or arrow, they would call a sinful arrow”.⁶⁰ If in fact Moffat had been well trained in biblical Greek, he would have recognised that the “Bechuana” notion of *boleo* was very similar to the Greek notion of *hamartia*, that is, ‘missing the mark’. But because Moffat was not adequately trained in Greek and because he is working with a particular theological understanding of ‘sin’, he dismisses a potentially important point of connection with the “Bechuana” religio-cultural world-view and a potentially important moment of translation. Without pausing to reflect any further on their understanding of *boleo*, Moffat goes on to adopt an adversarial stance, stating that “of a sense of sin arising from [personal] responsibility, they had no conception”.⁶¹

Moffat next turns to notions of ‘God’: “When I directed their thoughts to a great Being in the heavens, some looked up with a vacant stare, as if they expected to see something appear”. Persisting, Moffat writes that, “When I asked, Who made all things? they were only surprised that I should ask such a question”.⁶² Again, Moffat misses an opportunity for real conversation in the wilderness on the Sabbath.

But Moffat does record the two questions he is asked, though he does not probe their significance. First, “They wondered at our singing hymns, which ‘these valleys and rocks never heard,’ and inquired if they were war songs”.

59 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 383–384.

60 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 384.

61 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 384.

62 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 384.

Moffat does not reflect any further on this intriguing question, indicating as it does something of how the BaTlhaping and their neighbours may have understood the centrality of hymns in mission services and the related centrality of the Colony, with its military capacities, in the life of the mission. Second, “My books puzzled them; they asked if they were my ‘Bola,’ prognosticating dice”.⁶³ This question is an overt recognition by the Southern Tswana peoples, including the BaTlhaping, that Moffat is some kind of *ngaka* or “doctor”, and that they associate his books, including the Bible, as somehow central to his power ‘to doctor’ (*go alafa*).⁶⁴ Significantly, the two local ‘inquiries’ have to do with missionary texts or books, the hymnal and the Bible.

But these ‘conversations’ were yet in the future. In October of 1821 Moffat turns his attention to those within the mission. Moffat uses the Bible to establish order, “a rule of duty”, for those within the church, arguing that it is “unscriptural” for Christians to marry among the heathen BaTlhaping,⁶⁵ ‘warning’ such a person “of the evil into which he was about to plunge himself, by taking into his bosom a perfect heathen, destitute of all knowledge of the Son of God, ignorant, and foolish to a proverb”.⁶⁶ And, when those who have refused to attend church because of the presence there of this person who wants to marry a local BaTlhaping woman, Moffat rebukes them, arguing that this reason “for absenting themselves from a privilege inestimable” had been “injurious to [the] peace of the church” and that “their conduct was nothing else than a determination to sin against Christ by disobeying his command, because they could not mould another person’s mind into their views”. Though this last clause is rather odd, given Moffat’s determination to mould BaTlhaping minds into his views, he does not recognise this, ‘referring’ them instead to “a rule of duty in that case” found in Matthew 18:15–17, “which I had more than once read and explained in their ears”.⁶⁷ Just as Moffat had previously taken up the didactic rhetoric of the apostle Paul and ‘John’ instructing the early church, he now takes up the rhetoric of Jesus instructing his disciples:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two

63 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 384.

64 Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 55.

65 Moffat is probably referring here to 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (κβν)

66 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 27.

67 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 27.

more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (KJV).

Relentless in his attempts to establish order within and without, among those against whom Moffat wages relentless “Christian warfare” is the rainmaker. The missionaries and the BaTlhaping have different ways of harnessing water in this semi-desert landscape, and both parties recognise that water is a site of religio-cultural contestation.⁶⁸ Early in Moffat’s stay, during October of 1821, as they wait for the summer rains, he engages in a lengthy enquiry and argument with a visiting rainmaker. In this exchange Moffat makes a direct comparison between the “boola” and the Bible. ‘Calling on’ the rainmaker, “who is very complacent”, Moffat finds “him with his companion making rain, as was his habit”. Moffat then “enquired if it was by means of the boola (four small pieces of horn, sometimes ivory, of different sizes resembling dice, but their prognostications are drawn more from their position than the small holes when thrown down)”.⁶⁹ When the rainmaker replies in the affirmative, Moffat probes further, asking him “what kind of influence either the boola or himself had upon the clouds”. Willing to explain some aspects of his work but not others the rainmaker does not respond in the manner Moffat wants: “This he would not explain”.⁷⁰ But the conversation continues, with Moffat refusing to make any attempt to understand the religio-cultural logic of the rainmaker. Having tried to answer Moffat’s questions, then having “avoided answering my questions”, eventually the rainmaker “said that I had asked enough of questions”.⁷¹ But Moffat persists, piling up arguments from his own religio-cultural perspective, concluding his arguments by turning to the Bible. “I quoted and explained several passages of scripture bearing on that point”.⁷²

Citing the Bible is not enough, however, for Moffat. Moffat uses the Bible, as we have seen, as a weapon of warfare. Having quoted from and then explained particular biblical passages, Moffat goes on the offensive: “I pointed out to him

68 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 203–213.

69 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 28. See also footnote 28 for Schapera’s comments. Whenever a footnote is cited the reference is to Schapera’s commentary on the Moffat texts.

70 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 28–29.

71 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 29.

72 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 29.

the different periods in which he had been guilty of telling lies, that he took the honour on him which belongs to God alone". More gracious than Moffat, "The old man seemed to wish to close the controversy, and remarked that I had surely been long in the world". Unable to accept the compliment, an acknowledgement of Moffat's wisdom, Moffat has the last word (as he always does), replying "that age did not always increase wisdom, and referred him to the Book of inspiration".⁷³ Moffat makes no attempt in this exchange to engage the religio-cultural worldview of the rainmaker. He does not acknowledge, as does his son-in-law, David Livingstone, some years later in a similar conversation with a rainmaker,⁷⁴ that there are numerous resonances between their respective roles as 'doctors'. Moreover, Moffat fails entirely to explore the many potential resonances between the Bible and the BaTlhapang. The detail of the Bible is not Moffat's focus; he chooses "passages of scripture" that cohere around his particular Nonconformist⁷⁵ understanding of the Bible's core message.

But what the rainmaker may have gleaned from this rather one-sided exchange (as told by Moffat) is that there are similarities between his doctoring role in interpreting the *bola* and Moffat's doctoring role in interpreting the Bible.

The Vernacular Bible: Moffat's Language Labours

A few days after Moffat's conversation with the rainmaker, one of a succession of such contestations,⁷⁶ for notwithstanding the missionaries' disapproval the BaTlhapang continued to welcome visiting rainmakers among them, Moffat's attention shifts more fully to the matter of translation. What precipitates the refocusing is a "painful event", one among many as Moffat notes, but one "still

73 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 29.

74 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 210–211.

75 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 49–85; Johnson, *The Changing Shape of English Nonconformity 1825–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

76 Moffat refers to the rainmaker as "the worst of enemies to the Cause which lies so near to our hearts"; he is puzzled too by the 'mysterious ways of God', "that he [God] should permit a worm, a deceiver, to lead a whole nation captive to his will, and diffuse in every heart an abhorrence to the sweet economy of the Gospel" (35). See also Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 55–56, 70–71.

more aggravating” because it has to do with “Cedras the interpreter”,⁷⁷ who offers a vital resource to the missionary project.

Setlhodi, or “Cedras” to Moffat and “Seeklory” or “Sed rass” to Campbell,⁷⁸ grew up in one of the neighbouring clans, “one of the serf communities subject to the BaTlhaping”.⁷⁹ When he was twelve years old, Adam Kok, “a Griqua chief, who then lived far down the Great Orange River, happened to be hunting in that quarter, and came to his father’s house. Noticing their great poverty, he invited Seeklory to come with him, and take care of the sheep. His father at first would not consent to the proposal; but observing that Seeklory was anxious to go, he consented”.⁸⁰ While with Kok, Campbell’s story continues, Setlhodi was well treated, “but what was inexpressibly more important, from Kok’s connexion with missions, he became acquainted with the true God, and eternal life”. Campbell then tells of Setlhodi’s account of his conversion, writing that,

With great simplicity he stated, that after he had hear the Word of God a few times, it got into his heart, and the thought he had two hearts, which fought against each other. He then began to pray to God; the word of God also became precious to him, and he could not be happy without hearing it now and then; therefore he rode on his ox to Griqua Town on the Saturday, and returned to the Great River on the Monday.⁸¹

Without pausing to reflect on this intriguing account of conversion characterised as “two hearts, which fought against each other”, Campbell continues his “account”. “When Mr. Read came to the Griqua country, on his way to commence a mission to Seeklory’s countrymen, at Lattakoo, which he could not do without a Bootshuana interpreter, Seeklory, being able to speak both the Dutch and the Bootshuana languages, offered himself as interpreter to the mission till the Missionaries should acquire the Bootshuana language”.⁸² What made Setlhodi’s offer particularly appealing was that he was married to a young “Kalliharry” woman who had been taken forcibly from her people to “Lattakoo” as part of an attempt “to capture cattle”. “Serone”, the young woman, too had

77 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 31.

78 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in That Interior of That Country* (Two vols.; vol. II; London: Francis Westley, 1822), 188–192.

79 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 31, note 32.

80 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 190.

81 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 190.

82 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 191.

been taken from “Lattakoo” by a Griqua and she too had heard “the word of God” and was “considered a real convert”.⁸³ She too was able to speak both Dutch and Setswana. So they accompanied Read together, “at the commencement of the mission to Lattakoo, to act as interpreters, and they perform the duties of the office in a very satisfactory manner”.⁸⁴

But the story did not have a happy ending, for on the 4th of November 1821, a Sunday, shortly after “the dismissal of the forenoon services”, Setlhodi is witnessed severely assaulting a young pregnant woman, “Bonsiyné” by name. Both Moffat and Mothibi intervene, with some difficulty, for “he was a man of devilish spirit, proverbially so”, says Moffat.⁸⁵ “With a little struggle, however, she was rescued and brought to my house with the sanction of Mateebe”. Moffat is deeply troubled, writing, “Our minds being so disturbed with what had passed, we deferred the Lord’s supper till the succeeding Sabbath”. But while the Lord’s supper is postponed to the following Sunday, preaching is not. “In the evening I preached”, writes Moffat, “from Matt. iv, 9”.⁸⁶

As with each of the examples of Moffat’s preaching where there is a specific citation of the biblical text used, in this case too Moffat uses the Bible to speak to the particular events of the day. Moffat’s core message is concise, as we have seen, involving warfare between the forces of God (light) and forces of the Devil (darkness). Knowing God (as the believer does) is to have eternal life. Serving the Devil (as the heathen does) is to have eternal damnation. There is no middle ground. So on this Sunday Moffat preaches from Matthew’s account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by the Devil (Matthew 4:1–11). The cited verse, verse 9, is the climax, the third temptation offered to Jesus: “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, ‘All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me’” (verses 8–9, KJV). Moffat is clearly worried that one more of the small party of Christian believers is being led astray, choosing the glories of this world rather than of the world to come.

As Moffat investigates the matter over the next few days the “new fruits” of Setlhodi’s “apostacy” become clear. Setlhodi has taken another wife from

83 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 191, LMS, “Transactions at Lattakoo, Soon after the Arrival of the Missionaries; Extracted from the Journal of the Mission,” *Quarterly Chronicle of Transactions of the London Missionary Society, in the years 1815, 1816, 1817, and 1819*: 335.

84 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 192.

85 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 31.

86 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 32.

a neighbouring clan, the young woman he was beating, and this has caused tension with his wife “Serone”. However, Setlhodi has insisted to “Serone” that “he is a Bootchuana and determined to keep her [that is, the second wife]”.⁸⁷ Moffat comments that “Cerone [sic], the wife of Cedras, has suffered much from the late painful event. She has had seven children to him, and from her own testimony she has great bitterness of soul from his abominable conduct, and especially that of taking another wife”.⁸⁸ Moffat is also distressed to hear that “she left the place entirely last night”, particularly as “[s]he is a member of our church”.⁸⁹

Just as Moffat had sought the approval of Mothibi in rescuing the young woman, so too he takes considerable care in the process of dismissing Setlhodi from the mission. Ten days pass before Moffat records “the plan” he has ‘devised’ “to remove him from our premises, he having no further right to the privileges of that portion of ground and water appropriated by the missionaries to the office of an interpreter”. “We accordingly called him”, continues Moffat, “and stated that obedient to the rules of the station, he had no further right to either the ground or water, and therefore requested him to remove from our premises and deliver to us the articles he had belonging to the Institution”.⁹⁰ Though Setlhodi at first “agreed”, he then “objected”. So Moffat then takes the matter to Mothibi.

We retired and spoke with Mateebe on the subject, and stated that as Cedras had abandoned our rules, as well as the religion he once professed, and given himself over to the Bootchuanas, being determined to act as he thought best, we thought therefore that he was nothing more than a poor servant of Mutebee that Mutebe should remove him from our premises.⁹¹

The logic of Moffat’s contending notions of ownership are instructive. African Christians ‘belong’ to the missionaries; other Africans ‘belong’ to their chief. But the journal entry does not pause for reflection. Mothibi, reports Moffat, “replied that our demands were just”.⁹² But the matter does not rest there, for Mothibi then takes the matter to “Teyso” or Thaišo, a prominent BaTlhaping

87 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 32.

88 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33; see also note 37.

89 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33.

90 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33.

91 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33. The various spellings of ‘Mothibi’ are as indicated in the document.

92 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33.

headman who are responsible for Setlhodi.⁹³ However, nothing further is done by the BaTlhaping, and so it is only on the 28th December that “Br. H[amilton] and myself considered it our duty to lay before the Bootchuana chiefs our decided opinion of their conduct relative to Cedras”, including “Teyso, under whom he stands”, who Moffat reports “took an active part in the business”.⁹⁴ What follows, though told from Moffat’s perspective, offers an important insight into how the BaTlhaping leadership negotiated the missionary presence among them, as well as how the missionaries were willing to compromise some of their Christian principles in order to remain among them.

We [the missionaries] warned him [Thaišo], in the presence of Cedras, etc., that in case he was not removed from our habitation we would be under the necessity of removing the station to another spot. Cedras remarked in the course of the meeting that, instead of his removing, he would rather see us remove altogether. We stated that it was by no means our intention to remove finally, neither would we do it, let our situation be as it may, but only for peace’s sake to remove from the present spot. Teyso remarked that the Bootchuanas by no means wished our departure, but that they were entirely at a loss to know how to settle the business of Cedras. We stated that we considered ourselves ill treated by the Bootchuana chiefs, who all along had professed more affection for Cedras than for us. We exhorted them therefore to consider seriously what they were doing.⁹⁵

The next evening, “Cedras stated to us that he intended to remove from his hut and the garden, but on account of the children it was difficult for him at present”.⁹⁶ Clearly the BaTlhaping leadership have acted, though not formally, instructing Cedras to leave, allowing the missionaries to remain. Expecting a backlash, Moffat is surprised when, on the next day, a Sunday, “[c]ontrary to our expectations, the church was nearly filled with Bootchuanas”.⁹⁷ The BaTlhaping are making sure that the missionaries have got their message.

But even though attendance at church, both on Sundays and on weekdays, “has considerably increased since we spoke so decidedly on the case of Cedras”, making it “evident that they dread our displeasure more or less, nor would

93 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 33; see also 32 note 35.

94 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 39.

95 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 39.

96 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 39.

97 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 39.

they sanction our departure from them”, Moffat goes on to lament that “little can be done in the way of conversation”.⁹⁸ There is little interest among the BaTlhaping, even those who attend church, in the missionary message.

Having ‘removed’ their principle translator, Moffat’s writings turn increasingly to the matter of translation. The missionaries’ capacity to proclaim the message is dealt another blow in late January 1822, a few weeks after Setlhodi has been dismissed. “Jason”, who “[s]ometimes . . . was used as an interpreter, having some knowledge of the Dutch language” became ill and died in early February. However, as with Setlhodi, Moffat is not impressed by the moral character of “Jason”, who although having “some knowledge of the Dutch language, *but for all that he was terribly ignorant*”.⁹⁹ What Moffat means by ‘ignorant’, as is clear from his conversation with the dying “Jason”, is theological ignorance. Moffat worries that his interpreters are theologically inappropriate for the task.

Two days after “Jason closed his eyes in the sleep of death”, Moffat reflects on the translation task that lies ahead of him, for he has decided that he cannot rely on theologically inadequate Africans. On Wednesday the 6th February 1822 he writes:

I find the more I become acquainted with the language, the greater difficulties rise in view: the great want of small words, chiefly of the conjunctive, the great length of some, the aspirate guttural in others, and particularly the immense difficulty of translating theological ideas. Kingdoms, crowns, thrones, and sceptres, are unknown here. Difficulties would be easier encountered were a suitable interpreter to be had, which is not to be found. The one I now have I believe the best yet known, but still the difficulty of acquiring the real meaning of a word is incredible. I have collected a great number of words and committed most of them to memory, but feel the want of practice to make them familiar. I have come to the conclusion to take a journey into the Interior, in the course of the journey having nothing but Bootchuanas with me. I entertain a strong hope that by the time I return I shall be able to converse with considerable freedom.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 42.

⁹⁹ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 43. Moffat deduces this from a conversation he has with the dying “Jason”, during which Moffat “asked a few questions, but alas! he seemed entirely ignorant of the nature of what I had been speaking”.

¹⁰⁰ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 43–44. In a letter to her parents in February 1822 Mary Moffat writes: “At present Moffat is applying himself with all diligence to the language, as the particular object of his destination here. He finds immense

Here Moffat sets out his concerns about translation capacity. First, he has doubts about the capacity of the language to convey the message.¹⁰¹ Second, he recognises that he has no local dialogue partner, one that has the theological capacity to converse with him about translation. And third, his own capacity with the local language is minimal. As we will see, Moffat is determined to ‘master’ the language himself, so he himself will be able to control the translation of (and so) the biblical message. But his plan to set aside time and find a place where he can immerse himself in the forms of Setswana spoken among the Southern Tswana, including the BaTlhaping, is not implemented until 1826.

Throughout the next four years theological translation continues to be a central part of Moffat’s conceptualisation of mission. When “Francine”, “the wife of one of our Hottentots”,¹⁰² dies, having recently “made a full, free, and public, confession of all her iniquities”, Moffat commits her remains “to the dust” and “[i]n the evening [of Sunday 17th March] I improved her death from Revelations xiv, 13”.¹⁰³ What ‘improves’ her death is the opportunity it gives Moffat to interpret-translate her death into eternal life: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (KJV). That the injunction from scripture is to “Write”, is confirmation, for Moffat, of the task that lies ahead. Translation of the message must be controlled by missionaries.

But his frustration, evident in his journal entries, with the local lack of interest in the message continues, as he uses every opportunity to speak “to a few of the things of God” and then, “as usual asked a few questions”.¹⁰⁴ And when he does extract some response to his questions he is ‘surprised’ “that they were not more anxious to be partakers of that superior wisdom which . . . [they] saw us to be in possession of”.¹⁰⁵

I often [writing on the 15th May] find myself much at a loss what to say relative to the Kingdom of Christ at this station. A sameness marks the events of each returning day. No conversations, no enquiring after God,

difficulties from the barrenness of the language and imperfect interpreters, but he is naturally too persevering soon to lose courage”; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 102.

101 It is worth noting too that Moffat is particularly concerned about the paucity of ‘royal’ vocabulary available to him.

102 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 36.

103 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 46.

104 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 47.

105 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 49. Moffat records one such conversation here in which once again he refuses to take up the shared religio-cultural terrain that his African interlocutor offers him.

no objections raised to exercise our powers in defence. Indifference and stupidity from the wreath on every brow; ignorance, the grossest ignorance, forms the basis of every heart. Thoughts earthly, sensual, and devilish, stimulate to motion and mirth, while the great concerns of the soul's redemption appear to them like a ragged garment in which they see neither loveliness nor worth. O, when shall the day star arise in their hearts? We preach, we converse, we catechise, but without the least apparent success.¹⁰⁶

Reference to 'catechising' indicates that some translation is being done along the way. As Moffat expresses it, "While we are acquiring the language good is done, while it furnishes means for future usefulness".¹⁰⁷ He goes on to explain, reiterating in a letter dated 5th August 1822 to the Rev G. Burder of the London Missionary Society, the three points he had made earlier in his journal. First, he says, "The peculiar construction of the language renders it a task of much labour"; "especially", he continues, "when we consider the very imperfect means there is of acquiring it". Second, "There is not an interpreter who can give the proper meaning of a single sentence". And third, "From the influx of business I have been obliged unavoidably to attend to for this some time past, I have not been able to make the proficiency I would have wished, and which might have been reasonably expected". Once again he plans that, "After much hard labour, my situation is such as to enable me this summer to devote a suitable portion of time each day for the acquisition of so important an object".¹⁰⁸ He then summarises the translation work that he has been able to do so far:

I have translated Dr. William Brown's catechism in his 'Christian Instructions'. The catechism being originally intended for children, I have made a few alterations and additions. It is the most suitable I ever met with, is used, and well understood. I have also translated a great variety of other little pieces [including the Lord's Prayer which he includes in his letter], and trust soon to be enabled to speak to the Bootchuanas mouth to mouth. . . .¹⁰⁹

106 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 51.

107 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 53.

108 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 53.

109 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 53. See also footnote 91.

It is not accidental that a catechism is among the first items to be translated. As I have argued, Moffat's orientation to translation is theological. The Bible has a definitive theological message, and it is this that must be translated. Which is why local African translators are inadequate; they do not yet know the message. Writing to his elder brother, Alexander Moffat, in February 1822, Moffat characterises his notion of 'heathen' in the following way: "They are, I may say, without exception still perfect heathens, and have the most incorrect and corrupt notions of God and Death, which is all that they know anything about".¹¹⁰ "As to Jehovah", he continues, "a Saviour, Heaven, Hell, the Soul's immortality, and a day of retribution, which they hear from the missionaries, [these] are neither understood nor believed by any".¹¹¹ Moffat here acknowledges that he has been able to converse about God and death with the BaTlhaping and their neighbours, but that their understandings of these religio-cultural concepts are "incorrect and corrupt".¹¹²

In the same letter, somewhat off the record, writing to his brother, Moffat goes on to sum up the state of the mission: "All the good that can be said of them is briefly thus: they have got accustomed to us, and out of mere friendship for the favours they receive occasionally attend divine service".¹¹³ He then goes on to refute the claims of John Campbell about the BaTlhaping, saying, "Mr. Campbell, I see in the *Missionary Chronicle*, asserts that they have acquired correct notions of God, etc., etc. Let me assure you that the authority he has it from is false". Immediately he continues, making a link between translation and "correct notions of God, etc., etc.", saying, "The apostasy of our interpreter, a Bootchuana, and the abominable conduct of some of the Hottentots [who had also served in some situations as interpreters], have been the source of much grief to us, and formed a stumbling block in the way of the Bootchuanas".¹¹⁴

The letter confirms such connections, for Moffat turns, after a paragraph enumerating "how many difficulties we labour under among a people like these", to a paragraph on "a subject of more importance—the language".¹¹⁵

110 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 56.

111 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 56–57.

112 He gives his brother an example of how the BaTlhaping and their neighbours understand "Moreemo (God)" and death; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 56. Again, it is worth noting that 'death' is a preferred theme in Moffat's understanding of the Christian message.

113 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 57.

114 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 57.

115 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 57.

To you, who I should suppose have never studied a barbarous tongue, no idea can be formed of the labour and difficulty attendant on its acquisition, especially through a very imperfect interpreter. It is only within these few months that I have been in possession of means, through very imperfect, of acquiring it. In the course of that time I have been collecting words, idioms, and phrases. The language, which is barren and barbarous enough, and which of course is perfectly consonant to their ideas, will hardly admit of Theology.¹¹⁶

Moffat is not convinced that these Southern Tswana African languages can carry the weight of the message,¹¹⁷ though there is perhaps a hint here of the capacity of a language that has not yet had to bear such a burden being increased by its engagement with “Theology”. The hard work required to make the language receptive to “Theology” has become, as we have seen, Moffat’s preoccupation. But he continues to lament, year after year, in letter after letter, that “[t]he situation of a missionary in this part of the country unavoidably obliges him to devote nearly the whole of his time to temporal things. Seeing this, I have for the present resolved comparatively to neglect these, and persevere till I am master of the language ...”.¹¹⁸ Moffat’s notion of ‘mastery’ includes both the common sense understanding of becoming proficient in a language and the sense of controlling or disciplining the language so that it does the speaker’s bidding.

In another personal letter written some months later, in August 1822 to the parents of his wife, Moffat once again laments the “indifference” of the BaTlhaping “toward the Gospel”. Indeed, he admits, “they are a little surprised at our continuing to preach”.¹¹⁹ Moffat struggles to understand this “indifference”, offering a series of reasons. The first has to do with the enduring BaTlhaping understanding of the missionaries as traders: “They are friendly disposed, but interest is their object. If they are asked why they do not come to church, they reply, ‘You do not give us enough of tobacco, etc.’”.¹²⁰ The second has to do with

116 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 57.

117 This is contrary to what is claimed by some scholars; see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 217; de Gruchy, “The Alleged Political Conservatism of Robert Moffat,” in *The London Missionary Society in Southern Africa: Historical Essays in Celebration of the Bicentenary of the LMS in Southern Africa 1799–1999* (ed. de Gruchy; Cape Town: David Philip, 1999), 27.

118 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 58.

119 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63.

120 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63.

the religio-cultural frameworks of the BaTlhaping: “The wisest of them have still the most incorrect notions of God (namely, that he is a malicious being living in the earth), and as for heaven and hell, a Saviour, etc., they have heard, it is true, but they neither know nor understand what they refer to”.¹²¹ And the third has to do with BaTlhaping intellectual capacity: “In general they seem destitute of thought or reason. It is impossible to get them to reason on any known topic”.¹²² Again, such discussion leads Moffat to lament that mission work in the African interior is such as to render “hard bodily labour absolutely unavoidable”.¹²³ This in turn leads Moffat to lament that, “During the time I have been here, it has been impossible to attend to the acquiring of the language as I could have wished”.¹²⁴ Having blamed the physical work associated with mission for his lack of time to tackle the language, Moffat next blames the interpreters he works with, saying, “For the first six months I had no means of acquiring words or sentences, and of course only picked up by the ear any word that I could catch. Latterly I had an interpreter, though a very poor one”.¹²⁵ Moffat then turns to the capacity of the language itself, saying that in addition to these constraints there is also “the peculiar construction of the language”.¹²⁶

Notwithstanding all these constraints, Moffat declares: “But we cannot, we dare not, leave them, till we have at the very least acquired the language and conversed with them mouth to mouth on the things of God”. “Hitherto”, he continues, “we have laboured under great difficulties, having always been obliged to address them through an interpreter who understood neither language well, and [was] still more ignorant as it regarded the subjects interpreted”.¹²⁷ It is for such reasons that Moffat is convinced that he must master the language, doing without the linguistic and theological deficiencies of an imperfect interpreter. Moffat concludes his reflections on translation in this letter by stating that despite the difficulties, “I have not laboured in vain. I have translated into it a very excellent and suitable catechism of about 120 questions, now in use, also the Lord’s Prayer, and a great variety of other things for my own use”.¹²⁸

Reflecting back on this period in his book, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, written in London some years after the events described,

121 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63.

122 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63.

123 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63.

124 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 64.

125 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 64.

126 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 64.

127 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 64.

128 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 64.

Moffat summarises his contribution to a “the philosophy of missions”¹²⁹ on the subject of translation. He again reiterates his experience, stating that though “[t]he acquisition of the language was an object of the first importance”, “[t]his was to be done under circumstances the most unfavourable, as there was neither time nor place of retirement for study, and no interpreter worthy the name”.¹³⁰ And even when an interpreter was present, imperfect as he or she was, “and when every thing was ready for inquiry, the native mind, unaccustomed to analyze abstract terms, would, after a few questions, be completely bewildered”.¹³¹ While such assessments are by now familiar to his readers, he does go on to elaborate more fully:

A few, and but a few words were collected, and these very incorrect, from the ignorance of the interpreter of the grammatical structure either of his own or the Dutch language, through which medium all our intercourse was carried on. It was something like groping in the dark, and many were the ludicrous blunders I made. The more waggish of those from whom I occasionally obtained sentences and forms of speech, would richly enjoy the fun, if they succeeded in leading me into egregious mistakes and shameful blunders; but though I had to pay dear for my credulity, I learned something.¹³²

Besides bits of the language, Moffat learned a number of things about translation that he then goes on to discuss with a view to offering advice to others about “the philosophy of missions”. First, he addresses the practical aspects of missionary labour: “The reducing of an oral language to writing being so important to the missionary, he ought to have every encouragement afforded him, and be supplied with the means necessary for the attainment of such an object”.¹³³ Second, he turns to the interpreter:

A missionary who commences giving direct instruction to the natives, though far from being competent in the language, is proceeding on safer ground than if he were employing an interpreter, who is not proficient in both languages, and who has not a tolerable understanding of the doctrines of the Gospel. Trusting to an ignorant and unqualified interpreter,

129 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, v.

130 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 291.

131 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 292.

132 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 292.

133 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 293.

is attended with consequences not only ludicrous, but dangerous to the very objects which lie nearest the missionary's heart. The natives will smile, and make allowances for the blundering speeches of the missionary; and though some may convey the very opposite meaning to that which he intends, they know from his general character what it should be, and ascribe the blunder to his ignorance of the language. They are not so charitable towards his interpreter, whose interest it is to make them believe that he is master of a language of which they know nothing, and consequently they take for granted, that all is correct which comes through his lips. I have been very much troubled in my mind on hearing that the most erroneous renderings have been given to what I had said.¹³⁴

While acknowledging African agency, Moffat does not approve of who the African agent is and what the African agent does. For Moffat the remedy resides in the moral character of the missionary. Moffat imagines that the missionary character corrects the mistranslated message, which is why he is so fiercely committed to purging the mission of those who lack the appropriate moral character (whether European or African),¹³⁵ and so become “an enemy to the mission”.¹³⁶ For Moffat, the perfect proclaimer of the message is the moral missionary who has mastered the language.

However, it becomes clear that Moffat's image of the ideal interpreter-translator-proclaimer is rather narrow. In his journal for May–July 1823, while on a trip “to obtain knowledge” of the neighbouring peoples and their movements, for this was a time of increasing unrest,¹³⁷ Moffat stops over with the congregation of “Cupido Cakerlak”, who had accompanied Campbell on his first journey to the BaThlaping in 1813, and who was appointed the following year as an “assistant preacher” of the London Missionary Society. When Moffat visits him, he is stationed among the Korana peoples at Nokaneng, near ‘Old Lattakoo’.¹³⁸ Moffat joins this small congregation, which “consisted of his wife and children, besides those who accompanied me”, in a small dwelling, where “[t]he floor was his seat, and a dim burning fire his candle”. “He [‘Cakerlak’]”, Moffat continues, describing the service, “made a few remarks from a part of scripture, with much repetition, and concluded with a hasty prayer”.¹³⁹ Then,

134 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 293–294.

135 See for example Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 68–70.

136 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 295.

137 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 75.

138 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 18, note 7.

139 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 79.

rather oddly given Moffat's views on interpreters, "In the course of the evening I enquired if he had no Bechuan interpreter. He replied no, when I pointed out one whom I thought suitable. He seemed to refer to his appointment".¹⁴⁰ Instead of affirming someone who did the very thing Moffat advocated, doing his own interpreting and translating, Moffat casts aspersions on his character and theological capacity. Moffat proceeds to 'tell' him "that it was my opinion that he had better go to some place where he could earn bread for himself and family, and no longer remain on his present situation, where he could not till the ground but be a continued burden to himself and the missionaries". "These remarks", Moffat goes on to make clear, "arose from a conviction that the character of him, and especially his wife, were in the highest degree detrimental to the cause".¹⁴¹

Throughout this journey Moffat engages with those he comes among, "conversing on texts of scripture",¹⁴² inviting those he was conversing with "to put questions to me on any scriptural subject",¹⁴³ and preaching on scripture.¹⁴⁴ Among the biblical texts Moffat preaches on is James 1:18, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (KJV), as he reminds himself and his listeners of the kind of moral man he is.¹⁴⁵

But very quickly the recurring focus of Moffat's written reflection becomes the increasingly unstable interior.¹⁴⁶ Moffat's reconnaissance of the surrounding area leads him, on his return to the Kuruman, to propose that he should "proceed immediately to Griqua Town to confer with Mr. Melvill and the chiefs there, that a commando may join with them [the BaTlhaping] to defend the country from the ravages of a foreign enemy".¹⁴⁷ This proposal meets with the approval by Mothibi and the more than one thousand assembled "armed men" who gather on 13th June 1823. Moffat notes the impact of this missionary initiative: "Every individual seemed to be convinced that the missionaries were indeed their friends".¹⁴⁸ There are now additional pragmatic reasons for

140 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 79.

141 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 79.

142 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 81, 83.

143 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 82.

144 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 82.

145 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 86–87.

146 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 87. See Julian Cobbing's analysis of Moffat's narrative; Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988): 492–500.

147 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 87. The 'commando' Moffat envisages is not of the cattle raiding variety.

148 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 89.

Mothibi retaining a hold on the missionaries, though he must have been somewhat puzzled by the change, with the missionaries now actively supporting a commando, having previously designated commandos as immoral.

Indeed, when the commando from Griqua Town arrives, on Sunday the 22nd June, the mission changes forever in the minds of both the missionaries and BaTlhaping: “In the afternoon I preached from Psalm xx, 7. *The church was well filled. After the service it [the church] was converted into a barrack*.”¹⁴⁹ The italics are Moffat’s emphasis, indicating, as italics do in his correspondence, that he approves. And the next day “[a]mmunition was got in readiness. It is what has been collected from each of the missionaries, there being no powder of any consequence in the country”.¹⁵⁰ The Bible and the gun are now overtly collocated, confirming for the BaTlhaping that the two are somehow connected and that the missionaries control, for the moment, access to both.

The Military Bible: Moffat’s Mixed Message

The sermon Moffat preached in the church that was soon to be ‘converted’ (in more than one way) to a barracks, proclaims a mixed message. Psalm 20:7 reads as follows: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (KJV). Moffat has chosen a text that purports to distinguish between, through the conjunction “but”, military might and the agency of God. Through Moffat’s actions among the BaTlhaping and their neighbours at this moment in the history of the mission they are conflated. Not only does Moffat undermine the missionary position on BaTlhaping commandos, he overtly associates the missionary project with the military defence of a particular African people.¹⁵¹ He confirms this association as he ‘contemplates’ the aftermath of “this savage battle”, saying, “we cannot but admire the providence of God,¹⁵² that not one of our number was killed, and one slightly wounded”, whereas “[t]he slain of the enemy was between 400 and 500”.^{152a}

Moffat’s newfound military form of being a “friend” to the BaTlhaping dominates his correspondence, but he does still find time for reflections on language and translation. For example, as part of his “general observations” on “this [the battle] day’s proceedings” he comments: “Their [‘the enemy’]

149 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 90.

150 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 90.

151 Moffat notes a few days later as he recounts “the battle” that “I of course avoided discharging a single shot”, because “fighting was not my province” (94).

152 See also Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 96.

152a Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 95.

language appears only to be another dialect of the Bechuan; so much so that I understand them almost as well as the people among which we live".¹⁵³ As we have noted, what makes the BaTlhaping particularly attractive to the missionary translation project is that they are the southern most clan of what would become the Southern Tswana.

Failing to acknowledge his own role in the carnage but 'appalled' by the 'brutality' of both the BaTlhaping and their Griqua allies, Moffat, in "[r]eviewing the carnage of the previous day", 'startles' "at the dreadful effects of sin". "What a train of miseries mark the checkered scene of man's short life", he continues, "and how especially appalling is the state of degradation to which that part *of mankind* are sunk who inhabit the interior of the Continent!"¹⁵⁴ He goes on to contrast the desire for "the things of the world" which has characterised the battle with "the blood of Christ" which alone "can heal" and "the word of inspiration" which alone "can lead them from these 'doleful shades of heathenish gloom'". "What a call", he concludes, "for missionary exertions to tear away the veil!"¹⁵⁵

As soon as the Griqua commando withdraws rumours reach the missionaries and the BaTlhaping that "the enemy" plans to return "to revenge their losses", which causes considerable "uncertainty", so that "it appeared proper that our [missionary] wives and children should set off... towards Griqua Town, and remain till affairs were a little more settled".¹⁵⁶ When it becomes clear that this time Griqua support would not be forthcoming because Griqua Town itself was under threat, the male missionaries prepare to leave as well. Sunday the 6th July is a quite different Sunday from the Sunday two weeks before: "We held our services as usual, though but few attended. This was again [like the previous Sabbath] a Sabbath of confusion, but we were enabled to wrestle with God for wisdom and direction".¹⁵⁷ Moffat's notion of "Christian warfare" is becoming more muddled, as he gradually becomes aware of the mission's complex contextual entanglements. Mothibi certainly understands the potential consequences of a missionary withdrawal, and so during "the course of the day [of preparations for departure] Muteebe and several of his chiefs, with many women, came to testify their regret at our leaving them; though", Moffat is quick to add, "*at the same time*, they considered the step a reasonable one".¹⁵⁸

153 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 95.

154 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 97.

155 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 97. "Doleful shades" may allude to Isaiah 13:21.

156 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 98.

157 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 99.

158 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 99.

Though Moffat is extremely despondent about leaving, both the BaThlaping and their own “many things”, he confesses, “It is, nevertheless, sweet to reflect that the cause is the Lord’s, it cannot fail. He who bore our infirmities saith, ‘Lo, I am with you’. This with other precious promises, revives our wounded souls, and assures us that all these troubles shall work together for good”.¹⁵⁹ Moffat surrounds the missionary departure with citations from the Bible. But how the Bible is being used is significant, for it is apparent from these reflections that the missionary message is concerned about both “the things of the world” and the things of the world to come. Though they imagine that the latter is their primary focus, their own attachment to their families and ‘things’ proclaims a substantive interest in the former. Indeed, “We spent most part of the night [prior to departure] burying various articles and tools, which we are unable to take with us”.¹⁶⁰

The BaThlaping, who are watching carefully, will have noticed this “confusion”. When Hamilton arrives in Griqua Town a week later, on the 17th July, he reports, as Moffat records, “that the Matchlapees [part of Mothibi’s people], after our departure, had broken into both our houses and carried off several things, and that they had actually attempted to dig up the buried articles”. Hamilton reports too, writes Moffat, that “Muteebe had used his endeavours to prevent this, but without effect, *having little authority over his subjects*”. “However”, Hamilton had assured Moffat, Mothibi “gave the strictest orders to the man we left behind that whoever he finds stealing he must shoot”.¹⁶¹ Mothibi clearly understands the importance of the missionary valued “articles” to the absent missionaries. Moffat’s response to this news is mixed, stating that, “Though these severe orders will not be attended to, it is hoped that they frighten the depredators”.¹⁶²

One of the effects of the reverberations of the *Mfecane* or *Difaqane*, Moffat learns on his return in early October 1823, is that those of Mothibi’s people, “the extensive divisions of the Meyrees,¹⁶³ who remained at Old Lattakoo when Muteebe removed to the Kuruman, are now convinced of the advantages derived from a connection with the Macooas [white people], and are preparing to unite with Muteebe”.¹⁶⁴ Moffat also reports that his plans to relocate the mission to yet another site, this one of the missionaries choosing, are gathering

159 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 99–100.

160 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 99.

161 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 100–101.

162 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 101.

163 See Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110, note 24.

164 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110; see also 113.

momentum, in that at their request Mothibi had “sold us a large tract” of land.¹⁶⁵ Mothibi’s conception of this transaction would have been rather different,¹⁶⁶ and though Moffat assumes that Mothibi and his people will join them at the new mission site, this will not take place. The mission will relocate, but the Africans who join them will not be a particular people, they will be a peculiar people constituted by other forces, including the escalating unrest in the region.

In choosing the new mission site, which Moffat considers to be a missionary ‘owned’ site, Moffat has chosen a site “contiguous to the Kuruman fountain, out of which issues a stream of excellent water”,¹⁶⁷ within “an extensive valley”, lending itself to cultivation.¹⁶⁸ What recommends this site in particular with respect to access to water, Moffat explains to the Rev G. Burder of the London Missionary Society in a letter written in January 1824, is that “for quantity (so far as I have heard) it is unequalled in South Africa”. The significance of the quantity of water is explained as follows: “Experience had by this time convinced me that the present crisis [the regional unrest] was an eventful one, and pregnant with the most beneficial effects, both as it regarded the objects of the Mission, and the outward interests of the increasing population”.¹⁶⁹ Moffat imagines that one of the effects of the violence and social dislocation wracking the region will be that the BaTlhaping and their neighbours and allies, and others from further afield who fear for their security, will associate themselves with the military protection offered by the mission, and therefore the mission must be able to offer them water and viable agricultural land.

Cultivation, not cattle, is the missionary ideal.¹⁷⁰ As he goes on to acknowledge, Moffat makes this choice of site knowing full well that it is not the ideal site for the cattle centred BaTlhaping, or the “Bechuanas” in general. “It will be proper to remark here”, Moffat confesses, “that the Bechuanas are not generally willing to fix their towns near rivers or fountains, but always seek for a spot where thorn bushes are abundant”, and that therefore “you will see that some difficulties had to be overcome, especially there being no thickets of thorn bushes in the immediate vicinity of the place to which we were directing their

165 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110.

166 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110, note 23.

167 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 112.

168 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110. See also the description in Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 98–100.

169 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 112; see also 113, 117.

170 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism: Towards a New African Genesis,” in *The London Missionary Society in Southern Africa: Historical Essays in Celebration of the Bicentenary of the LMS in Southern Africa, 1799–1999* (ed. De Gruchy; Cape Town: David Philip, 1999).

attention”.¹⁷¹ So committed is Moffat to the Nonconformist notion that “civilization . . . must originate and depend on the culture of the ground”,¹⁷² what John Campbell referred to as “a complete revolution” of “the present system” of the “South African nations”,¹⁷³ that he chooses a site that he knows will not suit the very people he wants to reach with the biblical message. He argues in this letter to Burder that he is

persuaded that Dr. Philip will fully enter into my views on the subject, and gladly sanction the additional expenses it will require. We are assured that whatever expenses may be incurred to make the station permanent, it will be abundantly paid back, in greatly diminishing the usual expenses, exclusive of the time, labour, and risk, it will save the missionaries; and, what is of very great importance, we shall at once be enabled to lead the minds of the Bechuana men to agricultural pursuits.¹⁷⁴

Dismissive of the central place of cattle in the religio-cultural and political-economic reality of the BaTlhaping and other “South African nations”, Moffat ‘costs’ what it will take to civilise and convert, to de-centre cattle and to relocate African men (and women) in conformity with Nonconformist religio-cultural and political-economic frames. What the BaTlhaping want is an abundance of thorn bushes from which they can construct kraals to protect their cattle (and so their own religio-cultural and political-economic world). What Moffat offers is another world, centred on cultivation, and though he knows that “when the proposal was first made” to Mothibi “it was rejected with the utmost scorn”,¹⁷⁵ he hopes that “the present crisis” will provide the necessary external incentive, alongside the internal call of the proclaimed and practised missionary message.

The Short and Simple Bible: Moffat’s ABC

Translation of the missionary message is not forgotten, for in the same letter (an addendum dated the 2nd October 1823) in which he mentions the

171 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 112.

172 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 188.

173 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 60. See also Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 120.

174 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 113; see also 117. Moffat says that he paid “a comparatively small sum (about £5)”; but see the textual variations discussed in note 29.

175 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 112.

acquisition of “a large tract” of land for a permanent mission station, he also mentions he is, “of course much disappointed in the great acquisition I had intended to make in the language”.¹⁷⁶

One of the effects of the *Difaqane* in its various forms¹⁷⁷ is that it offers the BaTlhaping another way of making sense of the missionaries. Having taken one of Mothibi's sons, “Peclu [Phetlu], son and heir to Muteebe” and “Teysho [Thaišo], one of the Lattakoo chiefs” with him to Cape Town where he has gone to “con[sult] on the subject of the new station” among other matters,¹⁷⁸ Moffat reflects on their return to “New Lattakoo” on the 4th May 1824 on the effects of this journey on these representatives of two generations of the BaTlhaping. “They have now had ocular demonstration [in the Colony] for what they only knew from the hearing of the ear, and it is presumed that they are now fully convinced that we are neither refugees nor runaways, as they have sometimes hinted, but the contrary”.¹⁷⁹ Moffat goes on to note that “Teysho a few days ago remarked . . . that he little thought that we had so many friends”.¹⁸⁰

That the missionaries have significant trade and military alliances is already clear to the BaTlhaping, but what this trip to Cape Town makes clear to the BaTlhaping is that the missionaries themselves belong to ‘a people’. In Moffat's reflections on this trip to Cape Town he hopes that the BaTlhaping have seen “the advantages” of an alliance with the missionaries and “Macooa-land” (“the white man's land”).¹⁸¹ Moffat's hope too is that “when Peclu has the reins of government into his own hands, he may be induced to make alterations in some of the inconsistencies of their system, which tend to check the increase of knowledge and improvement, and keep the weaker sex in a state of comparative slavery”.¹⁸² There are clear echoes in Moffat's language of the gospel narratives, particularly the Gospel of John, where on numerous occasions new disciples come to recognise and accept Jesus because they ‘see’ what they had previously (only) ‘heard’ (John 1:44–51; 4:29, 39–42). For Moffat has high hopes for “Peclu” (and “Teysho”), who we learn from Mary Moffat, in a letter dated 21 November 1823, “have begun on the road to learn the alphabet”, “walking about with the A.B.C. in the hand, and still more pleasing, sitting to be

176 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 110.

177 But with the common characteristics of struggles to control people, cattle, and land.

178 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 113–114, and also notes 26 and 27.

179 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 116.

180 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 116.

181 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 116 and note 44.

182 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 116.

catechised in their native tongue”,¹⁸³ which is all part of the ongoing work of Robert Hamilton. Mary Moffat concludes her letter by linking the schooling of Thaišo with the Bible: “The tear of joy will sometimes start from the eye on witnessing the animated sensibility of Teysho when making enquiries respecting scripture truths...”.¹⁸⁴ Mary Moffat it would seem can already detect the ‘animating’ effects of literacy, particularly when literacy is coupled with the reading of the Bible.

While on a promised visit to “Macabbe, king of the Wankeets” (and to “acquire some authentic information respecting the invaders”) in July and August of 1824,¹⁸⁵ there is an inadvertent foreshadowing of one of the characteristics of the kind of Africans Moffat’s new mission station will attract. As is Moffat’s custom, each Sabbath is dedicated to prayer meetings and preaching, and “[o]nce or twice during every weekday I illustrate and apply a portion of scripture”.¹⁸⁶ Reflecting on his “congregation” on one of the Sabbath’s, he comments: “My congregation, about forty in number, are indeed a mixed multitude; with the exception of two or three, they are all of a very indifferent character”.¹⁸⁷ Writing about the situation at the mission station in 1827, John Moffat, the son of Robert Moffat, notes that “[i]n the year 1827 there began to be a sort of change.... The bulk of the Batlaping tribe, utterly weary and impoverished by the incessant forays of the western banditti, had drifted away eastward and settled along the course of the Vaal and the Kolong rivers; but their place at Kuruman had been in a measure supplied by a mixed community of refugees from the interior tribes”.¹⁸⁸ The established (in both senses of the word) clans of the region retain their religio-cultural and political-economic independence of the mission, even when they cultivate alliances with the missionaries. But for the many who have been dislocated from their communities or who inhabit the margins of their communities the mission offers the potential for a more substantive affiliation.¹⁸⁹

183 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 111.

184 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 111–112.

185 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 118.

186 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 123–124; see also 128–129.

187 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 123.

188 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 153–154.

189 There are signs too, as we have seen, that even socially well-placed women, like Mmahutu, reflect on the alternative ways of life that a hybrid African Christianity might offer; see her conversation with Moffat many years later, recounted in a letter dated December 1835; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 201–202. What is also evident from this 1935 letter is how the translated “Gospel of Luke” has begun to be appropriated; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 201.

As he travels among the neighbouring peoples, still hoping to convert a chief and his people,¹⁹⁰ Moffat has more time for reflection than he normally does, so we have the opportunity to eavesdrop, as we have been doing, on his religio-cultural logic and how this frames his understanding of the religio-cultural logic of the African peoples who welcome him among them. Having given “a short and simple address” to a chief and his assembled people, Moffat then records in his journal that “afterwards, as my custom is, [I] entered into conversation on the subject or subjects of my address”. Immediately, imagining his implied European reader to understand, already, what he will say next, Moffat adds: “but being a people no way inclined to controversy, little can be effected”.¹⁹¹ Moffat then explains the logic of his analysis, arguing, “They have no religion *of their own*, and [therefore] of course [are] not tenacious of any tenets”.¹⁹² This “completely erroneous”¹⁹³ understanding of African peoples is a large part of why the mission is not as ‘fruitful’ as Moffat would hope; the missionary message is based on an erroneous analysis of African peoples’ religio-cultural world. But Moffat does not know his error, so he persists, saying, “It is verily the case with them as our Redeemer declares [citing Matthew 6:31], for every thought and action of their lives concentrates in ‘What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewith shall we be clothed?’”.¹⁹⁴ Given this (erroneous) analysis, argues Moffat, “The missionary must have patience, and, in a religious point of view, consider them as children, nor wonder though they require to be taught the A.B.C. a thousand times over”.¹⁹⁵ Because African peoples are like children with respect to religion, the missionary must repeat, over and over again, the “short and simple” message of scripture, “the A.B.C.” of the Bible.

Though Moffat himself relies largely on the potential protection the missionaries might offer these African peoples in these times of widespread ‘invasions’ to draw them to the new permanent mission station at what will become known as ‘Kuruman’ (Seoding),¹⁹⁶ Moffat does not like it when his African interlocutors emphasise such pragmatic reasons for forging connections with

190 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 128–129.

191 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

192 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

193 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129, note 33.

194 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

195 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

196 And to draw them to other imagined mission stations in the interior; see Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 131, 136, 138–139, 144, 172. While Moffat is away it is Hamilton who begins work at the new site; see Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 157.

the missionaries. When the “Barolongs”, whom he is visiting, hear Moffat speak “on the importance of a missionary living among them”, they are receptive to the offer, but only because, Moffat muses, they are “aware of the temporal advantages derived (for eternal interests have for them no attraction)”.¹⁹⁷

Moffat fails to recognise that these African peoples, as with the others who welcome him among them, discern resonances between their religio-cultural understandings of the world and that of the missionaries. For the Barolong in welcoming Moffat’s offer of a missionary presence respond, as Moffat records, as follows: “One remarked, ‘You must come and make rain for us’¹⁹⁸ Another remarked, ‘You must come and protect us’”.¹⁹⁹ Part of their ‘pragmatic’ response to Moffat is predicated on some African recognition of overlap in their respective religio-cultural outlooks. But Moffat is unable to recognise this, and so sets himself and the mission over against the potential resonances. Moffat dismisses these ‘remarks’ and their potential for real ‘conversation’, stating instead, “I explained to them the object and work of a missionary, and referred them to the Kuruman Mission”.²⁰⁰

Incapable of real ‘conversation’, Moffat offers instead the routines and regimes of the mission station, the dimensions of Nonconformist Christianity that these African peoples find most difficult to embrace.²⁰¹ In the place of real ‘conversation’, a conversation in which the Bible might offer resources for interreligious-cultural engagement, Moffat ‘dumbs down’ the Bible, treating African peoples like children who must be given milk, not meat—like children who must be taught their ABCs. It is not surprising, therefore, that translation of a catechism takes precedence. Quoting from the final verse of the book of Jonah (4:11), Moffat implicitly collates the “many cattle” of the Ninevites with the many cattle of the “Wankeets”, who like the Ninevites, “know not their right hand from their left”, and thereby “invite the missionary to come and help them”.²⁰²

While among the “Wankeets”, during early August of 1824, Moffat “introduced the subject of religion, by asking if the Wankeets possessed any

197 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

198 See Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129, note 34; Hamilton had, on an earlier visit (see Chapter 3) prayed for rain while with them, and “it has rained heavily during his visit”, so that “he was viewed in the very imposing light of a rain-maker”.

199 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

200 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 129.

201 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 179.

202 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 140.

knowledge of God”.²⁰³ This deficit approach to African religion and culture characterises much of missionary ‘conversation’, which becomes clear as Moffat continues, saying: “I stated that if he [‘the great Makabbe’]²⁰⁴ would listen I should give him some knowledge of man as well as God”.²⁰⁵ What then follows demonstrates yet again the potential for real conversation as well as the debilitating effects of Moffat’s didactic message:

*The doctrine of the Bible filled them with astonishment. The soul’s immortality and the resurrection seemed to strike them the most; they looked as if they expected the latter to take place while I was speaking. Makabbe three times very interrogatively asked, ‘Shall the dead live?’ I answered, yes. ‘The bones on the plains?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Bodies consumed by beasts of prey?’ ‘Yes.’ He at length exclaimed, ‘My ears hear to-day.’ One remarked, ‘I have killed man, but I never saw the breath or soul escape.’ I referred him to both wind and heat, which were both felt and believed, but invisible. On this Makabbe remarked that he was an old man, but never once thought of these things before. You were (says he) lately describing the character of God, and from your description of our souls they must resemble God. I answered, in some respects they did resemble. On my enumerating some of the works of Jesus Christ, one very naturally exclaimed, ‘What an excellent doctor, to raise the dead!’ When I referred them to a place of rewards and punishments, they seemed not so well pleased.*²⁰⁶

Moffat turns what might become substantive conversation into a form of catechism, with the confirmation candidate being instructed through a series of questions and answers. That Moffat and his hosts both envisage some kind of connection between books (particularly the Bible) and such instruction is clear as Moffat concludes this ‘conversation’, writing, “They were greatly interested with a description of books and letters”.²⁰⁷ But this is not Moffat’s final comment on this ‘conversation’. His final sentence is deeply ironic, for it acknowledges that ‘conversation’ does take place among his African interlocutors, but fails to recognise his own reluctance to engage in this ‘conversation’: “I was happy to find afterwards that many who were not present at these sermons

203 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 141.

204 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 135.

205 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 141.

206 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 141–142. This potential dialogue partner becomes a victim of the territorial violence shortly after Moffat’s visit (197).

207 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 142.

of instruction came to my waggon and made inquiries, which evidenced that the subject was made of general conversation".²⁰⁸

The (M)aligned Bible: Moffat's Temporal and Eternal Message

"War, tumult, and discord, are the common topics of the day", says Moffat as he concludes his journal for July–August 1824.²⁰⁹ Amidst shifting forces that he cannot control, though he makes regular attempts to influence what he can, Moffat affirms: "Our cause is the cause of an all-sufficient God, whose word cannot fall to the ground".²¹⁰ In a letter to his brother dated 22 September 1824 Moffat confesses his fear: "A painful uncertainty now rests on our prospects among the Bechuanas, and shakes our late pleasing expectations concerning them. Our own situation is rather precarious; for we know not but we shall be obliged to fly before the day closes, or become a prey to the lawless banditti, who, if reports be true, threaten our destruction. All around us is a sea of trouble . . .".²¹¹ With echoes of the Psalmist and Job, Moffat feels himself beset, both by bodily sickness²¹² and contextual uncertainties. In a later letter to his brother dated 9 December 1824, written from Griqua Town where he has fled seeking what "can scarcely be viewed as an asylum from the conflicting scenes which surround us", 'abandoning' the mission station,²¹³ he reiterates his anxieties, stating that "the state of the interior was still the theatre of war and bloodshed" and that "dark and intricate are the ways of Providence".²¹⁴

Just as Moffat is unable to recognise the religio-cultural reality of the Southern Tswana, so too he is unable to recognise his own 'temporal' investment. For when Mothibi asks that one of the missionaries accompany his commando on a reconnaissance mission, Moffat refuses, claiming he does not want to be seen "interfering in their political affairs" and that "hitherto it was well known that we had kept ourselves neuter". He goes on, however, to admit interference, but qualifies this interference, writing that "as the servants of God we

208 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 142.

209 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 154; He repeats this phrase in a letter to his brother; see Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 162.

210 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 155, see also 169.

211 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 161.

212 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 161.

213 But leaving Hamilton and Hughes behind; see Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 165, 168.

214 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 164; see also 167, 174.

had proposed measures which, if they had duly appreciated, would have been both for their temporal and eternal interests".²¹⁵ Mothibi is quick to respond, replying "with a scornful air that the Griquas, who had been nurtured under the Gospel, were involved in war".²¹⁶ The contradictions of Moffat's 'Gospel' are apparent to the BaTlhaping.

Beside the temporal-political contradictions, Mothibi and his people contend with Moffat's eternal-spiritual understanding. When "Peclu, the young prince" dies (towards the end of March 1825), Moffat, now back among the BaTlhaping,²¹⁷ is full of "a mutual sympathy" and a deep disappointment, for "[w]e ourselves were inclined to hope that on his assuming regal powers a favourable change would likely succeed".²¹⁸ "[B]ut", continues Moffat, shifting from the temporal to the eternal, "the Judge of all the earth has otherwise determined".²¹⁹ However, when "Munamits [an uncle of Mothibi and therefore a significant clan elder] enumerated a variety of particulars relative to the death of our young prince; but alas! no testimony was left connected with his prospects in a future [eternal] state", Moffat intervenes and "made some remarks on the importance of submitting to the divine will, 'who was too wise to err', etc.". ²²⁰ "These remarks", Moffat goes on to record, "gave rise to an argument of some length".²²¹

The BaTlhaping, in Moffat's partial understanding, assert that "[w]hen any person, especially of note, dies, it is generally attributed to some person or persons whom the relatives charge with having bewitched the deceased". Moffat continues, immediately, to indicate that the BaTlhaping are not persuaded by his religio-cultural account, for "[n]otwithstanding the knowledge of Christianity which Muteebe and his relatives possess, in this case superstition predominated".²²² What Moffat fails to recognise, again, is that the BaTlhaping are indeed 'conversing' and 'arguing' with him. They are engaged

215 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 165. See also de Gruchy, "The Alleged Political Conservatism of Robert Moffat."

216 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 165.

217 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 179. Moffat returns on the 18th March 1825.

218 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 180.

219 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 180.

220 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 180.

221 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 180.

222 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 180. There is a similar assertion of local religio-cultural practice with respect to healing; see Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 185–186.

in conversation, albeit a protracted (religio-cultural and political-economic) conversation.²²³

A less verbal form of argument may well be the disposition of Mmahutu, Phetlu's mother. Moffat records how nearly a month after his death, "Mahoota and her female retinue appeared still immersed in great sorrow, and the rehearsal of Peclu's name called forth the latent sighs and briny tears". He then adds that, "In a conversation between Mrs. M. [Moffat] and Mahoota, the latter remarked that had her son fallen in battle she should have felt less, but he alone in the bloom of youth was taken away; that every object, and especially his youthful companions, contributed to revive the remembrance of her beloved son".²²⁴ Moffat's use of the word 'revive' is ironic, for Mmahutu may well remember the discussion she had many years earlier (in 1813) with John Campbell about resurrection,²²⁵ and the many many subsequent invocations of resurrection by the missionaries. She may wonder why, given all the missionary talk of resurrection for those who have embraced their message, there is no 'reviving' for her son, who had received missionary instruction. Neither Robert nor Mary Moffat delve more deeply.

There are other arguments among the BaTlhaping as well. The BaTlhaping understand full well the temporal protection the missionaries offer, periodically locating themselves, as do others, "near" the new Kuruman mission station whenever their own settlements are threatened.²²⁶ But this proximity to the mission station is itself a matter of public argument among the BaTlhaping, with some at "a public meeting" convened in early May 1825 advocating that they leave "this part of the country" and Mothibi and others resolving "to remain in the vicinity of the station", though some way off, where the temporal conditions were more conducive, "where there are thorn bushes to build temporary folds".²²⁷ Towards the end of May, however, despite having access to "the words of eternal life" via a missionary visit "every Sabbath", Mothibi decided that proximity to the mission station was not enough to protect them

223 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 171.

224 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 181.

225 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1815), 199.

226 See for example Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 182, 184.

227 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 185. In a letter dated 9 June 1825, Moffat admits that these are only "temporary huts", and that "[w]e are at present the only inhabitants on the once populous Kuruman" (196).

temporally from an 'expected' attack.²²⁸ And so he departs the area, forging his own forms of safety.

Signalling another area of contestation, Mothibi's younger brother, "Mahura", "very warmly and publicly disapproved of the step his elder brother had taken in leaving the missionaries, who were his most faithful and constant friends. Immediately on declaring his mind, he collected his subjects and cattle, and repaired to the Kuruman, [and] took up his residence at the top of the valley near to our station".²²⁹ Following this example, "several companies of the Batlaroo, who had suffered severely in the late attacks, followed his example, and placed themselves on the east side of the valley, opposite to our houses, where they built several small villages".²³⁰ Though the clusters of huts around the mission station "are daily increasing", writes Moffat sometime after the beginning of June, and though the missionaries visit these villages "every Sabbath", "attendance fluctuates from twenty to forty".²³¹ Moffat's eternal message is not the reason for forms of 'settlement' around the mission station. Temporal protection is part of the reason, and mimicry of missionary 'civilization' and cultivation is another. Moffat writes approvingly of "the way in which Mahura has behaved", pointing to "his strong predilection for civilization", signalled for Moffat in that "his attendants are always seen in European dress as far as is practicable" and in that they "have also commenced planting maize and tobacco, a thing before unknown among these Western tribes".²³² Some of the Southern Tswana are prepared to experiment with missionary modes of dress and cultivation.

In this section of the journal, less a day-by-day report and more a general assessment of the period from June to November 1825, Moffat calculates profit and loss in both eternal and temporal terms. Access to increasing numbers of relocated peoples is counted as a potential profit, while the indications that Mothibi would probably not return "this season" is counted as a loss.²³³ Then there is "the loss of so many thousands of cattle, garden produce, etc., which, together with the total suspension of sowing corn for the last two years by the Griquas, has affected our support in no small degree".²³⁴ But moving the mission station to Kuruman is counted as a profit, for being located at "the old

228 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187.

229 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187; see also 198.

230 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187.

231 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187.

232 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187; see also note 32.

233 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 187–188.

234 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 188.

place” meant being “dependent entirely on foreign supplies, which double the present salary would not cover . . .; also, that by continuing at the old station a complete barrier was ever in our way of being useful in point of civilization, which must originate and depend on the culture of the ground”. In sum, Moffat argues, as “has been minutely pointed out in former letters. . . . By moving from that spot, no loss whatever has been sustained”.²³⁵

As we have already seen, “the culture of the ground” is a missionary metaphor for “a complete revolution”,²³⁶ a revolution that was both temporal and eternal.²³⁷ Sedentary agriculture should, the missionaries believe, replace semi-nomadic pastoralism and the centrality of cattle in the African religious and political-economic worldview,²³⁸ removing cattle raiding as one of the primary causes, from Moffat’s accounts, of the unrest in the interior. Sedentary agriculture, using the superior tools and techniques and seeds of European agricultural production, would in due course not only reform the moral character of Africans, it would also enable them to produce agricultural articles of trade, tying them through trade to Christian Europe, and binding them to a monetary economy.²³⁹ This re-ordering of African life would also put men and women in their proper, missionary imagined, places. Separated from their cattle, men would take up their proper place in the fields, and women would take up their proper place in the home.²⁴⁰ Moreover, the overall effect of this imagined revolution would be the creation of a form of “rational individualism”²⁴¹ that conformed to the missionary model of temporal and eternal salvation.

As we have seen, the Southern Tswana of this time contended with both the temporal and eternal message and model proclaimed and practised by Moffat and the missionaries. From Moffat’s accounts, and the accounts of other mid-nineteenth century visitors to the interior, there was “a sustained ambiguity”²⁴²

235 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 188. There is some tension between Moffat, Philip, and the Directors concerning the cost of “forming a new mission station on the Krumen”, and Moffat is instructed to ‘confer’ with Philip and to receive “his sanction to the undertaking”; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 193–194.

236 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, a Second Journey*, Vol. II, 60.

237 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 56.

238 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 57; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 144–146.

239 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 57–58; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 258.

240 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 60–61.

241 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 60.

242 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 67.

not only to mission agriculture but also to the (associated) mission gospel. In the long run, as John and Jean Comaroff have argued, “an agrarian revolution was imminent”,²⁴³ with the mission ushering in “new forms of individualism, new regimes of value, new kinds of wealth, new means and relations of production, new religious practices . . . [a]nd processes of class formation”.²⁴⁴ But this would only happen, haphazardly, in “the long run”.²⁴⁵ In 1825, as Moffat reflects on the state of the mission, assessing its profit and loss, the envisaged temporal and eternal revolution was a long way off. As one African leader from the region told the missionary John Mackenzie four decades later, “We accepted the Word of God in our youth, but did not know what was coming behind it”.²⁴⁶ As the Comaroffs outline, what was to come ‘behind it’ was “a broad confluence of historical forces . . . converging on this world: among others, a mineral revolution, with its insatiable demand for cheap industrial labour; overrule by two separate colonial states, each with its own apparatuses of governance; and further territorial expansion on the part of settler populations”.²⁴⁷ The missions, among them Moffat’s, played a significant role as a religio-cultural “vanguard”²⁴⁸ in preparing the way for “what was coming behind it”.

While this African’s ‘it’ considers more than the Bible, ‘it’ certainly includes it. And while Moffat might yearn for the kind of missionary-European control that would enable his temporal and eternal vision to be actualised within the unstable interior, his control was substantially constrained by Africans. What he could control was the translation of ‘the Word of God’, and so his time and energy turn more and more to this core component of mission.

The Instructive Bible: Moffat’s Mode of Translation

Reporting on the latter half of 1825, and having reported on the infrastructure of the mission, Moffat then sums up the progress made with respect to a range of other core missionary activities.

Our services are continued at the stated times, but are poorly attended. We visit the Bechuanas regularly, and every Sabbath a catechetical

243 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 67.

244 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 81.

245 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 67–81.

246 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 80.

247 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 80.

248 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Cultivation, Christianity & Colonialism,” 80.

meeting is held in their language. On the Sabbath Br. Hamilton also holds an adult school. The weekday school is carried on by Br. Moffat [—“This is properly Mr. Hughes’ department, but since the month of August he is entirely unable to attend to it or any thing else.”]²⁴⁹ Twenty-three attend, composed of Bechuanas, Hottentots, two Bushmen, and two Mantatees. They are all taught English, excepting five, who are so far advanced in Dutch that it was deemed proper to make them first proficient in that language. Three of the Hottentot girls, who read English, are taught writing.

Some time ago a spelling book, catechism, and scripture exercises, were forward to Dr. Philip to be printed, which on receiving the Bechuana language will be immediately commenced in school. . . .²⁵⁰

In a private letter to his wife’s parents, dated 15 November 1825, Moffat makes it clear the resources referred to in the final paragraph are in the local language, for he writes that “[d]uring the last three weeks I have been exclusively employed in fixing the orthography of the Bechuan language, and preparing for the press a spelling book, a Catechism, and scriptural exercises”.²⁵¹ Moffat’s proficiency in the local language is partial, but was sufficient for these tasks, as well as the task of interpreter.²⁵² But in his review of the year (1825), as he begins his journal for 1826, he says: “I feel ashamed at not having made more progress in the acquisition of the language. I now live in hope that I shall be able this year to acquire it fully”.²⁵³

In Moffat’s “retrospect” of the previous year, “[w]e look back”, he says, “to a space of time filled up almost exclusively with losses and crosses, perplexities and distresses, hopes and fears, witnessing scenes of barbarity and wretchedness”.²⁵⁴ As he struggles, amid an array of metaphors, to find “a few solitary tufts of green” amid “a barren wilderness”, Moffat offers his own personal assessment of whether he has been “faithful if not successful”. It is here that he says, as indicated above, “For my own part, when I look back on the past year, I feel ashamed at not having made more progress in the acquisition of the language”.²⁵⁵ Faithfulness requires, it would seem, completing the

249 I have included Moffat’s footnote in the parenthesis.

250 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 191.

251 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 202.

252 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 204.

253 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 209.

254 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 209.

255 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 209.

task of translating the Bible. This is clear in how the tasks of the mission are described during Philip's brief visit to the mission station. In a visit full of tension, the tasks of the mission station are divided as follows: "At our solicitation he [Philip] did converse with us a few minutes on what we were individually to attend to, when at Mr. H's [Hamilton] proposal it was agreed that I should attend exclusively to the study of the language and school, till such time as Mr. Hughes was able to take charge of the latter, and Mr. Ham. [Hamilton] was to attend to the temporal affairs of the station".²⁵⁶ Translating the Bible was central to the eternal affairs of the station.

The rhythm of Sabbath services now includes, on the 22nd January 1826, a prayer "offered in their language", with which "[t]hey professed to be pleased".²⁵⁷ This is the only positive feedback Moffat receives from this service, for the few men whom he preached to "appeared extremely indifferent about what they had heard".²⁵⁸ It is such 'trifling incidents' that provide Moffat, perhaps, with the impetus to finally take up his long anticipated journey to acquire proficiency in the language. As Moffat takes stock of the "profit and loss" of the previous year and of the prospects for the year to come he is filled with despondency. "[T]he scene", he had written in his journal a few weeks earlier, "affords but one dark prospect, were it not for a few apparently trifling incidents which, like the solar rays, however small, brighten the scene and bid us hope for better days, when we are assured that the sun of righteousness shall shine in full meridian splendour". He goes on immediately: "At present we feel no inclination to relinquish our post or relax our labours, assured that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. For my own part, when I look back on the past year, I feel ashamed at not having made more progress in the acquisition of the language".²⁵⁹

The labour that remains, the labour that offers a small ray of hope, to borrow his metaphor, would appear to be the translation of the Bible. So on the 17th February Moffat writes: "With a view to become more familiar in the language, I have resolved to proceed on a journey to some Bechuana villages, where I shall have an opportunity of conversing with the natives exclusively, without aid of an interpreter".²⁶⁰ And this time Moffat does indeed undertake such a journey, setting off on 23rd February. However, as in previous years temporal matters intervene, for as Moffat pauses on his journey in

256 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 203.

257 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 210.

258 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 210.

259 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 209.

260 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 210. See also the letter by Mary Moffat to her parents, dated 1 April 1926 (223).

a nearby village, “reading, etc., and making enquiries about the interior”, he receives news “from home” that “a considerable number of cattle had been taken by horsemen”. With the temporal (cattle) once again trumping the eternal (Bible), “I accordingly returned and reached home on the 28th, and heard with satisfaction that the cattle were retaken and the horsemen fled”.²⁶¹

The planned trip appears forgotten in the journal entries from March to May 1826. There are occasional references to Moffat’s “persevering in the language” and brief linguistics notes,²⁶² but for the most part the journal entries follow the contours of previous journals, documenting the cattle that are taken and then retaken,²⁶³ the construction of mission houses,²⁶⁴ sickness,²⁶⁵ local superstitions,²⁶⁶ Mothibi’s commandos,²⁶⁷ a visiting botanist,²⁶⁸ the weather,²⁶⁹ the kind of “staunch piety” required of missionaries in the interior and its absence among most missionaries,²⁷⁰ missionary salaries,²⁷¹ a plague of locusts,²⁷² Griqua commandos,²⁷³ worries about safety,²⁷⁴ political alliances,²⁷⁵ instruction of “the Bechuanas resident on the station”,²⁷⁶ the receiving of periodicals and letters,²⁷⁷ an elephant hunt,²⁷⁸ . . . among other entry items, with perhaps a little more emphasis on both Moffat’s and Hamilton’s preaching,²⁷⁹ and more introspection on the part of Moffat, as he struggles with his own “low” “animal spirits”.²⁸⁰ Indeed, when he preaches from Psalm 89:15 on the 2nd of April 1826, he is the intended receiver of his own sermon:

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- 261 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 211.
 262 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 212, 213 note 13.
 263 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 213.
 264 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 212, 217, 218, 219.
 265 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 212, 213.
 266 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 215, 218–219.
 267 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 216.
 268 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 216.
 269 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 215–216.
 270 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 217–218.
 271 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 217–218.
 272 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 218.
 273 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 219.
 274 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 219.
 275 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 219–220.
 276 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 220.
 277 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 220.
 278 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 221.
 279 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 211, 212, 214, 215, 217, 218, 220, 221.
 280 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 213.

Preached in the morning from Psalm 89, v.15. During the first part of the sermon I felt much liveliness, but when the latter part was discussing I felt extremely dull. ‘They shall walk in the light of thy countenance’, what a blessed state, and yet how little I experience it! I could not help contrasting the declaration [of Psalm 89:15] with my own experience, which seemed to throw me into confusion when treating the subject [during the time of discussion following the sermon].²⁸¹

In the very next journal entry, from the 6th of April, Moffat confesses: “Felt great liveliness in calling on sinners to come to Christ, though now I am melancholy and cannot rid myself of the idea that my labours are in vain”.²⁸² However, at the end of May 1826 Moffat appears to have come to terms with the prospect that the mission station will continue to attract, as permanent residents, only those who for a variety of reasons are marginalised by and who are marginal to the dominant social systems of the African interior. Again, looking back, as he increasingly does, over the period from January to May 1826, Moffat writes:

For a considerable time past we had appointed the Tuesday evening expressly to instruct the Bechuanas resident on the station, who are chiefly poor, and several of them strangers (Mantatees). The attendance has hitherto exceeded our expectations, so that they also attend on the other nights when service is held. As it regards these objects, we labour in hope, recollecting how in the Apostolic age the glorious Gospel was first received by the poor, and frequently by the despised. ‘Not many noble’, says the Apostle [1 Corinthians 1:26–28].²⁸³

Why Moffat is depressed when he looks back over his years in the interior is because these marginalised and marginal people are not the intended “objects” of his mission. He reluctantly recognises that “these objects” may be the only ones who see in the mission some potential for a temporal (and perhaps even an eternal) home. In the long run the Bible will become a resource, whether in the missionary tradition or in the neo-indigenous traditions of African Independent and African Initiated Churches, for the many Africans who are marginalised by and who are marginal to the hybrid social systems that do

281 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 215. The biblical citation in the journal entry is “Psalm 189”, but this is incorrect. There is no Psalm 189, and Moffat’s quotation is from Psalm 89:15.

282 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 215.

283 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 220.

come in the wake of the missionaries and their colonial accomplices. But that Bible is not yet translated into African languages, so Africans in the interior have no other option but to engage with it through the missionary message.

In another letter to Burder dated the 30th May 1826, Moffat continues in his melancholic mood, writing: "Reflecting on the number of months which have passed since closing our last communications, we feel it our duty again to ask ourselves, what there is worth committing to paper. On reviewing our journals [January–May 1826], we see nothing that can interest, at least that is calculated to diffuse joy".²⁸⁴ Significantly, he does not mention those—the kinds of Africans—who have chosen to settle at the mission; instead, he laments those who have not, despite having layed "before them every inducement to settle".²⁸⁵ Whom he has in mind (contrary to the earlier citation from 1 Corinthians) are the "noble" "objects" of the interior, like Mothibi and others "of the most respectable Batlapee families".²⁸⁶

Moffat then goes on, immediately in this letter to Burder, to say: "As to any salutary effect which the word has, that must be looked for hereafter. In the meantime, we are imparting knowledge...". And then, immediately, he reminds Burder of the "lessons and exercises on the Sichuan language" which had been forwarded to the Cape, having reached it "before Dr. Philip left for England" in late January 1826.²⁸⁷ Moffat concludes this paragraph of the letter saying, "We feel anxious for their [the lessons and exercises] return, as nothing can be done in the school till books are used in the native language".²⁸⁸

But it is only in a letter to his parents, dated 6 February 1827, that Moffat returns to his interrupted and postponed project. Again, he is rather bleak about the prospects of "the Mission", stating that "Satan still maintains his throne in the hearts of the natives",²⁸⁹ and enumerating the many ways in which "the providence of God seems to have frowned on their superstition",

²⁸⁴ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 225.

²⁸⁵ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 226.

²⁸⁶ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 226. When the notables do decided "on settling" near the mission station (temporarily) in June 1826, they refuse to 'fix' "the town immediately below the station". Instead, Mothibi "objected to this, adding that as the commandos always came from that quarter, he wished us to be between him and them" (230).

²⁸⁷ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 226, and notes 11 and 12. In another letter to Burder, dated 13 November 1826, Moffat again asks about these materials, asserting that it is a year since the materials were sent to the Cape (232).

²⁸⁸ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 226.

²⁸⁹ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 233.

including drought and death.²⁹⁰ He goes on in the letter to say that, “[s]ince the house was finished, I have relinquished the public work and applied myself to the language, and will do so until I am completely master of it, when an extensive field will open for mental operations”.²⁹¹ In his analysis the “most important part of the work” is “to become perfectly familiar with the language”, and “[b]y such means I shall be enabled to become acquainted with the very peculiar grammatical structure of the Sichuan language, which of necessity must be acquired before the work of translation can be fairly commenced”.²⁹² He reiterates how such proficiency can only be found “by associating exclusively with savages, entirely alone, without an individual who can speak a word of either English or Dutch”.²⁹³

Moffat’s journal for March–June 1827 documents his journey to acquire the language, leaving Kuruman on Wednesday 28th March 1827.²⁹⁴ This journal is full of geographical, environmental, and social detail,²⁹⁵ as well as the location of particular local peoples in the ongoing aftermath of the regional unrest.²⁹⁶ It also offers an insight into how difficult Moffat found it to prioritise acquisition of the language, preferring to spend time, for example, with a local “smith” working iron, and comparing African and European techniques.²⁹⁷ When he does get down to some “reading or writing”,²⁹⁸ he is bothered by the hot dry weather and the flies, “as they drink the ink out of [the] pen with which I am writing”,²⁹⁹ and by “the swarms of importunate beggars with which I am hourly surrounded”.³⁰⁰

Moffat admits, however, that the people among whom he travels “are very hospitable and friendly”, and that by conversing with them “I learn something”.³⁰¹ As always, Moffat continues to take every opportunity, particularly on the

290 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 233.

291 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 234.

292 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 234.

293 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 234.

294 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 237–260, 238. See also the letters to his wife; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 261–264, 264–266, 266–267.

295 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 239–240, 244–245, 249, 257.

296 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 241, 250, 251, 254–256.

297 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 242, 245–246.

298 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 243, 245.

299 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 243, 264.

300 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 243, 250.

301 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 244.

Sabbath, to preach and converse with the local African peoples.³⁰² Learning the language, however, is often subordinated to instruction. When, for example on the 15th of April, he preached “unto them the Gospel of salvation”, he notices that the local people are discussing aspects of what he has said among themselves. Instead of sitting among them as a listener, imbibing the language and noting how the local language is being used to translate the particular concepts he has used in his sermon and what aspects of his message resonate most with his African interlocutors, he is “much grieved to hear them making a kind of diversion of some part of the discourse, particularly that which related to a future state of reward”.³⁰³ Unable to listen more than “a few minutes”, Moffat intervenes to instruct, to intimidate, and to silence: “After listening a few minutes, I went and placed myself among them, and resumed the subject in a way of argument; when they changed their tone, especially when I dwelt on the article of death, to them a subject of all others the most unpleasant, and alas, no wonder, for the utmost stretch of their faith is annihilation”.³⁰⁴

It is little wonder, with such an approach to local religio-cultural understandings, language acquisition, and translation that Moffat, the next day, writes that he “[f]elt very low and dispirited, and ready to think that my visit here will not answer my expectations”.³⁰⁵

But Moffat does not learn from such experiences. Instead, he persists with instruction, and now that he has found a thematic focus—death, he is relentless. A few days later he initiates a “conversation” on death with “a young widow” which draws in a number of other partial participants. As is his custom, Moffat is not really interested in conversation, but is determined to instruct, and to instruct on a topic that he knows from experience unsettles his audience.

My first question [to the young widow] was, what would become of her after death? She stared at me with the utmost astonishment, as if she had said, ‘Shall I die?’ Repeating my question, assuring her that death would spare neither of us, she at last answered, that she knew not. I gave her a plain scriptural answer, namely that she should go to hell if she died in

302 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 243, 246, 247–248, 249, 250, 251, 253–254, 256, 257, 258, 260.

303 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 246.

304 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 246. Moffat knows that, “Death and a future state are subjects they do not like to contemplate, and when they are introduced it frequently operates like an imperative order for them to depart”; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 252.

305 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 246–247.

her present state. I added that the wicked would be turned into hell, etc., etc., and pointed out that she was really of the number that forgot God. She looked at me, and added, 'You are a man of wisdom, how can you talk in that way?'³⁰⁶

Instead of using the young widow's question and rebuke, probing as she does the differences between their respective religio-cultural frameworks, as a basis for further in-depth discussion, Moffat simply chooses a new target, turning to "an old man who stood by" and putting "the same question" to him. And when other women "had come to the waggon", no doubt to hear what was generating so much animation, "I continued the subject".³⁰⁷ The pattern is the same.³⁰⁸ He recognises a moment of engagement, but chooses to intimidate rather than to nurture the opportunity for real conversation: "They smiled at first, but when I spoke on the immortality of the soul, the coming of Christ, the events of that day, and the burning of the world and all things therein, they seemed really alarmed".³⁰⁹ When he invites participation he cannot hear what they are saying, having already framed their remarks or questions in a negative 'dark' light: "At intervals I made a pause, to allow them to make remarks or ask questions, and some of these showed the degradation of their minds".³¹⁰ And instead of trying to understand the religio-cultural context of the remark or question, Moffat simply dismisses their perspective, overruling their perspective with the missionary understanding of biblical theology:

One seemed much concerned to hear that the oxen, etc., would be destroyed with all other earthly things, and particularly that there would be none in heaven. 'What would become of beads, ornaments, etc., when the world was on fire?', asked another, and one asked (as if in some degree acquainted with scriptural language), 'And we who remain alive at his coming, what shall become of us?' Paul's words were a ready answer.³¹¹

What such 'conversations' do demonstrate is that Moffat has a very limited understanding of the diversity of biblical theologies concerning death and life after death. Indeed, his vague reference to "Paul's words" conveys his own

306 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

307 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248; see also 265.

308 See also Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 250–251.

309 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

310 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

311 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

reluctance to include a definite biblical citation or quotation that might be contested by his primary interlocutors in London. What such ‘conversations’ also demonstrate is that Moffat’s translation of the Bible will be of a very particular theological kind.

What such ‘conversations’ also demonstrate is that Moffat works within a fixed theological frame. In a letter to his wife, written during this journey, Moffat tells her how he has “committed the whole of the Catechism, etc., etc., to memory, which also became better stored with a variety of words, by which I find that I am able to reason with and address them in a way pretty well understood”.³¹² One form of this theologically predetermined product is the prayer Moffat reads to the women he has been talking to. “On hearing one [of the women he is instructing] say that she would like to be able to pray, I took from my pocket a prayer in Sechuan which I had just composed, and read it, which appeared to please them much”.³¹³ Reflecting on this appreciation of his prayer and his attempts to compose in their language, Moffat writes that “[t]he season above described [including the instruction and the prayer] gave me inexpressible pleasure, but at the same time pain, that I could not fully and freely disclose the grand attractions of the Cross. I felt as if incompetency in the language only prevented me from converting them”.³¹⁴ These reflections too are instructive in terms of how Moffat understands language and translation. First, in Moffat’s mind there is a simple correspondence between the Bible, the biblical message, and the missionary message. Translation of the missionary message is the translation of the Bible and translation of the Bible is translation of the missionary message because, for Moffat, the biblical message is singular, hence his regular use of ‘Gospel’ with a capital ‘G’ or his reference above to “Paul’s words”. Second, Moffat imagines that the only competency he requires in the local language is the competency to translate this singular message.

Indeed, we read in his journal (which has become more of a personal diary) a few days before this protracted ‘conversation’ took place of his frustration with learning Setswana: “Find much difficulty in carrying on a conversation in Sechuan, if the subject is exclusively of a worldly nature”.³¹⁵ He wants a form of the language that he can control, and recognises that as soon as he moves away from a narrow theological vocabulary that he cannot control the language: “For natural things or actions there seems to be a super-abundance of

³¹² Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 264.

³¹³ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

³¹⁴ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 248.

³¹⁵ Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247.

names. I sometimes despair of ever becoming perfect in the language. Every new subject pours with new terms, with completely baffles me".³¹⁶ He blames the language itself, writing that, "I am every day more convinced that the Sechuan language is very difficult to acquire in its present verbal state".³¹⁷ And he blames "the want of a good interpreter, for in the course of conversation I hear very many words which completely baffle my understanding, and often render the whole sentence unintelligible".³¹⁸ The procedure he has chosen to adopt, which forces him to engage with language as it is used, he finds unproductive, working as he does with a conception of language as static and fixed: "I am in such cases obliged to note down such words and phrases, and listen to hear them in another conversation in which the words may be used. If I had any one at hand [who was a good interpreter] to give me their real meaning, I should make more progress".³¹⁹ Indeed, his concept of language matches his concept of the Bible, the biblical message, and the missionary message. What they share in common is that they are clear, fixed, and have one determinate "real meaning".

Without an interpreter, for how could someone with Moffat's singular notions of language and religio-cultural reality find any interpreter that was "good", Moffat has to put up with the feedback he does receive: "my mistakes in conversation are never corrected, and very often mimicry and loud bursts of laughter are the corrections made on what I think sometimes very good".³²⁰ But, he acknowledges, a few days earlier, "even from that conduct I learn something". So Moffat perseveres with his own particular mode of language acquisition and translation, 'pursuing' "my studies with considerable pleasure".³²¹

There are moments when Moffat makes a half-hearted attempt to understand, both in terms of the processes he employs in 'conversation' and in terms of the subject matter. For example, on the 6th of May, a Sabbath, he reflects: "I feel most happy when I can get them to contradict or doubt of the truth of what is stated. I find that information by way of dialogue makes the deepest impression on their minds".³²² Yet even here Moffat's primary purpose is not 'dialogue' but conveying 'information'. He goes on in this same reflection to make a momentary attempt to understand his African hosts' religio-cultural

316 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247.

317 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247. In a letter to his wife, written during this journey, Moffat notes also "the little differences in dialect" (264).

318 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247.

319 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247.

320 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247; see also 244 for a similar observation.

321 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 247.

322 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 251; see also 264.

perspective, writing, “I try sometimes to conceive of the extent of their happiness in life, supposing, as they do, that annihilation envelops all beyond. They seem happy, and that too in a superlative degree, when the flesh pots are full”.³²³ Yet even here Moffat’s understanding of their religio-cultural reality is limited, even in the area that consumes his preaching and conversation, namely death and life after death. He also does not understand the importance of communal feasting, particularly when it is meat that is being consumed.³²⁴ He finds it impossible to ‘lend’ “an ear to their conversations” without instantly condemning what he overhears, branding them as “trifling” and ‘obscene’.³²⁵

There can be no doubt from Moffat’s record that he is closely observed throughout this journey, as he and the missionaries always are. He regularly comments on the many interruptions and the “daily visitors” to his wagon and tent.³²⁶ His African visitors almost certainly notice his writing, his reading of the Bible, and his reading of letters. On the 18th May, with Moffat struggling to remain focussed on his “usual studies”, he receives letters from Kuruman, “which I eagerly perused”. He notices that he is being observed, for “[t]he people about me seemed to wonder that my attention could be so much taken up with a piece of paper”.³²⁷ That Moffat’s representation of the message of the Bible did not resonate with the Southern Tswana did not mean that they were not ‘wondering’ about this much used book.

And that Moffat’s preaching did not resonate with the religio-cultural world of the Southern Tswana did not mean that they were unappreciative of Moffat’s attempts to converse with them in their own language. In a moment of clarity, having preached on the 3rd June on John 3:16, prior to his return to Kuruman, Moffat learns “on enquiry”, having been “first struck with the attention” he has received, that “the attention” he has received “was only aroused to see me address them in their own language”.³²⁸ Moffat is “pleased and affected” by this forthrightness, by this “plain dealing”, and this prompts him to ask his hosts “if they were tired of my company and my preaching”.³²⁹ The answer he receives is less frank, for “[t]hey answered that they regretted that I was leaving them so soon, and resumed their entreaties that I should stop at least another

323 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 251.

324 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 126–169.

325 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 251–252; for another example of the same pattern see 257.

326 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 252; see also 243, 248, 249–250.

327 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 253.

328 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 258.

329 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 258–259.

month”.³³⁰ The Southern Tswana realise that they have to put up with missionary preaching in order to secure the missionary presence and its associated potential benefits.

Moffat is grateful for the way in which he has been received by his African hosts as he reflects back on his journey and his sojourn among them, commenting on the ‘comfort’, ‘hospitality’, ‘friendship’, ‘concern’, and even the ‘blessings’ he has received, particularly when he was not well.³³¹ The journal does not include an evaluation of the principle reasons for undertaking the journey, though he does appear troubled regularly by the worry “that I should not succeed in my object according to expectation”.³³² His letters to his wife, Mary Moffat, written during this time contain little more in this regard, though he does tell her that he had hoped “to have had before this time [25 April] a supply of grammatical sketches, etc., etc., but have not been able to get them ready”.³³³ But it is not clear from Moffat’s journal and correspondence of this brief period whether or when he was able to construct an outline of the grammar of Setswana.

Amidst the ongoing turmoil in the interior,³³⁴ with “numbers of different tribes on the station”,³³⁵ and the mission station itself partially vacated for a period,³³⁶ the various theological and educational texts translated into Setswana that had been sent for printing are eventually returned to Kuruman,³³⁷ brought by Robert Miles, the Acting Superintendent of the London Missionary Society, who arrived at Kuruman in the middle of November 1827.³³⁸ One

330 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 259.

331 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 259.

332 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 259.

333 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 265.

334 In a letter to R. Miles, the Acting Superintendent of the London Missionary Society, dated 5 December 1827, Moffat lays before him “a statement of facts” of “the depredations committed in this country by different marauding parties from the Orange River and its vicinity”, from August 1824 to the present; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 272–278, see also notes 30–33. In a subsequent letter dated 30 January 1828, Moffat provides a follow-up account; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 278–279. And he provides another update in a letter dated 26 August 1828; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 285–289. In his book on the lives of Robert and Mary Moffat, John Moffat points to 1837 as a year in which “the aspect of affairs in the interior underwent an ominous change. The emigration of the Dutch farmers, disaffected to British rule, had commenced”; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 214, 214–220.

335 So writes Mary Moffat in a letter dated 6 December 1827; Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 271.

336 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 270, 280.

337 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 272.

338 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 270, 280.

thousand copies of both “the Bechuana Spelling-book and Catechism . . . with strong covers adapted to the use of children” are sent from London, with the promise that “[t]he same number of each work will remain behind, which, when a favourable opportunity occurs, will probably be forwarded to the Cape”.³³⁹ The arrival of the printed material enables Moffat “to commence school in that language”.³⁴⁰ He also reports, in this regard, that “[t]here are already four Bechuanas who are reading the Rev. Mr. Brown’s Catechism in their own language”.³⁴¹ Alongside these translated texts, Moffat introduces another genre of translated material: “We have also begun to sing hymns composed in the language, which is very enlivening”.³⁴² “Independent of the above”, concludes Moffat in this letter to Richard Moffat, his brother, dated 15 February 1828, “I have in addition to the daily concerns of the station to pursue my studies in the language, that I may be able soon to put something additional into the hands of the scholars. I have just commenced a translation of the selection of passages of scripture by the same author as the Catechism, etc.”.³⁴³

While the detail of the translation process remains largely opaque, what is clear is that Moffat’s focus remains resolutely theological. The catechism Moffat prefers is John Brown’s (1722–1787) *A Short Catechism for Young Children*,³⁴⁴ which consists of two hundred and four questions and short answers. “[T]he selection of passages of scripture by the same author” probably refers to Brown’s *An Essay towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism*,³⁴⁵ in which the author often includes a reference to a particular biblical text after the catechetical ‘answer-response’ to the catechetical question, providing a ‘proof-text’ for the answer-response. This work also includes a lengthy address to young readers: “An Address to the Young Readers of This Catechism”, an address that shares many features with Moffat’s theological perspective. It is no wonder that Moffat writes that “in a

339 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 272, note 29.

340 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 281. Moffat reports that he has “also commenced night school, which does well; the attendance, chiefly adults, has risen to forty, while that of the day is nearly fifty (including fourteen of Jan Karse’s children and domestics, who are learning Dutch)” (281).

341 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 281.

342 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 281.

343 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 281.

344 Brown, *A Short Catechism for Young Children* (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1869).

345 Brown, *An Essay Towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism* (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1812). The “*Assembly’s Shorter Catechism*” refers to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, written in 1646 and 1647 by the Westminster Assembly, a synod of English and Scottish theologians and lay members of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

short time I trust to be enabled to put a number more into that class",^{345a} referring to the class that is reading "the Rev. Mr. Brown's Catechism in their own language". This is the site in which Moffat is forging his translation of the Bible. Moffat's Bible translation project is primarily about producing a proof-text for his theological framework.

Moffat is aware, as he has indicated, that there are variations in the Setswana language group, and in a letter to James Smith, his father-in-law, dated 18 February 1828, he writes that it is his intention, "the Lord willing, ere long to go and reside some months among the Baharutse, for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of the Sechuan language as spoken by the Bakuen, there being differences; indeed, such a step would be requisite before the orthography was finally settled".³⁴⁶

Moffat does not undertake this trip, for the region remains 'disturbed'; it will fall to others to 'settle' Setswana orthography. By the end of the year, Moffat writes to Richard Moffat, his brother, in a letter dated 30 December 1828, "The interior remains still disturbed by wars", so that "[m]any of the natives live on the station, as well as in the immediate neighbourhood", though "Mutebe is still absent from the Kuruman".³⁴⁷ To those resident on the mission station and to those resident in the immediate neighbourhood, "the Gospel is preached", writes Moffat. "The attendance", he continues, "particularly on the Sabbath, is good, and if it continues so, it will be requisite to have a large place of worship built. We are cheered with the sincere attention paid by many to the truth of the Gospel".³⁴⁸ As the turmoil in the interior takes its toll on the social fabric of African communities, the mission station becomes a site for some to settle, so setting in process neo-indigenous hybrid forms of African religion and/as culture and missionary Christianity, and so a diverse range of 'African Christianities'.

As Moffat goes on to communicate in this letter, partial (in both senses of the word) translations of Bible are about to make their distinctive contribution to this syncretistic mix. Moffat tells his brother that, he has "translated the Gospel of Luke with other portions, both from the old and new Testament".³⁴⁹ Translated texts from the Bible now take up a formal presence on the mission station: "From these I am enabled to read to them a portion of scripture in their own language". Moffat has also begun, he tells his brother, the process

345a Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 281.

346 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 282. For the (reconstructed) relationships between these peoples see Schapera and Comaroff, *The Tswana*, 3–5.

347 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 289.

348 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 289.

349 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 290.

of translation revision: “I have also corrected and enlarged a second edition of the Catechism, etc., and I intend to prepare a school book or two, of course much superior to the first in point of orthography and arrangement. I am just now engaged in translating a selection of Passages from Scripture by the Rev W. Brown, a work which cost me much labour, but which, I am persuaded, will be of great utility both in school and families”.³⁵⁰ The latter is a section of a book by the son of John Brown, William Brown, and again the focus is children: *Christian Instructions for Children from Three to Seven Years of Age*.³⁵¹ The book contains a catechism for children (simpler than his father’s version), passages of scripture (linked to the catechism), and hymns. In describing the section “Passages of Scripture”, the author says the following:

The Passages of Scripture are meant to be commonly repeated in succession; but with a view of exercising the understanding of the learner, and of building his faith as much as possible on the word of God, it will be desirable that the Teacher in hearing the Catechism should, as often as is practicable, make him bring forward from the Scripture a proof of what he has said. Thus, when the Child has answered the Question, “Can you see God?” the teacher may say, “Will you give me a passage from the Bible which tells you that nobody every saw God?” To this the Child, if he understands what he has learned, will reply: “No man hath seen God at any time.” In order to render this exercise more easy, the Editor has numbered the passages of Scripture, and has made references to them from the Catechism wherever they appeared to form a suitable proof of any question.³⁵²

Significantly, the passages from the Bible in this section of the book are not referenced with a biblical citation. The biblical passages float free of their location within a particular biblical book. As is the case with Moffat, William Brown works with the Bible as a proof-text for specific fixed formulations of Christian faith. Both Brown and Moffat use biblical texts as if they cohere to form a single definitive message.

In this same letter, Moffat mentions too the hymns he has ‘composed’ or translated in the local language, writing that “[t]he hymns I compose in the

350 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 290. See also the letter by Mary Moffat (292).

351 Brown, *Christian Instructions for Children from Three to Seven Years of Age* (Edinburgh: James Robertson, 1820).

352 Brown, *Christian Instructions for Children from Three to Seven Years of Age*, introductory page.

language are soon acquired, and sung well, which has a very pleasing effect on public worship. Some of the natives", he adds, "also sing them in their families ...".³⁵³ On his visit to the mission station in November 1827, Robert Miles had "suggested the very great importance of preparing something like hymns in the native language, which being constantly sung, the great truths of salvation would become imperceptibly written on the minds of the people".³⁵⁴ Reflecting back on this period in his book *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, the period of the first theological texts in the local African language, Moffat asserts: "This was the dawning of a new era on our mission".³⁵⁵

Moffat's theological purposes in the translation project of this new era are clear; what was not at all apparent to Moffat was what would be done, by African hands, with the translated Bible. But the translated Bible was itself some way off. It is not until October 1830, while in Cape Town, that Moffat applies "to Sir Lowry Cole, then governor, to allow the gospel of Luke to be printed by the government printing-office".³⁵⁶ At the same time, with Moffat having decided "to learn printing" so that the printing press that had been designated for the mission station could now be put to use,³⁵⁷ "[a] small hymn-book was also printed in the language".³⁵⁸

When Moffat returns to Kuruman in June 1831, "we brought with us an edition of the gospel of Luke, and a hymn book in the native language, a printing press, type, paper, and ink".³⁵⁹ With a printing press now in place on the mission station, translated materials appear more promptly, the pace being set by the pace of Moffat's translation work. Robert Miles had also suggested to Moffat the "importance of introducing the Scripture Lessons", and so Moffat "set about a translation of this invaluable work, which after many years experience, I feel no hesitation in pronouncing an inimitable production for schools, and for building up converts among the heathen, in the absence of the entire Scriptures".³⁶⁰ In September 1833, "portions of the Scripture Lessons were turned off".³⁶¹

353 Moffat and Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 290; see also 346.

354 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 478.

355 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 478.

356 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 562.

357 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 165–166, 171–172.

358 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 563.

359 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 563.

360 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 570.

361 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes*, 570. And this work is still continuing in December 1835; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 204.

This text, *Scripture Lessons, for Schools on the British System of Mutual Instruction*, formulated by Joseph Lancaster as part of his foundational contribution to the Nonconformist educational system embodied in the British and Foreign School Society, was a form of Bible catechism as educational formation.³⁶² The *Scripture Lessons* were a “selection of Reading lessons, taken from the Holy Scriptures in the very words of the Text, without note or comment”; given which, “we may hope for the most important results, for it is an acknowledged truth that those grand principles upon which the present and eternal happiness of man depend, are no where laid down with such clearness and sublimity, as in the inspired writings of the Old and New Testament”. Furthermore, the “Preface” continues, “No system of Ethics or of moral reasoning which the wit of man ever yet contrived, can equal the system laid down in the Holy Scriptures, for it has been well observed, that this book has God for its author, Salvation as its end, and Truth as its subject”.³⁶³

It should be noted how again and again, by Moffat and many others, the Bible as a whole, in its detail, is not trusted to have such effects. It is only a theologically determined “selection” of particular biblical passages placed in a particular order that can be trusted to make the kinds of transformation the missionaries and Nonconformist educators “hope for”. As we will see, the Bible, unfettered by particular theological selections and orderings, will have wide-ranging missionary unintended effects.

And more and more of the Bible is being translated by Moffat as he becomes more proficient in the language and as translation of the Bible becomes more of a priority. Writing to his brother, Richard Moffat, in July 1834, he writes that,

Much of my time has been taken up in acquiring the language under innumerable trying circumstances, and now that I am able to translate I view every moment as doubly precious. I am trying to redeem much precious time which has been lost. I see nothing in the world worth looking after if it has not a direct reference to the glory and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom; and were we always able to have a lively view of the myriads who are descending to the horrible pit, our zeal would be

362 Goldstrom, “The Content of Education and the Socialization of the Working-Class Child 1830–1860,” in *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* (ed. McCann; London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977), 95–96.

363 BFSS, *Scripture Lessons, for Schools on the British System of Mutual Instruction* (London: J.B.G. Vogel, 1820).

proportionate. Much depends on us who have received the ministry of reconciliation, assured that God our Saviour willeth the salvation of all.³⁶⁴

In a letter to her father, dated 18 July 1836, Mary Moffat reports that notwithstanding “some heavy trials”, including that “[s]ome of our church members have grievously departed from the path of rectitude” and that “[t]he school is not flourishing as it was”,

The translating and printing are going on. The Scripture lessons which were in hand are finished, a volume of 443 pages. The Assembly's Catechism is also in print and in use; readers are increasing in every direction. A man was here last week to fetch away his daughter to go and teach the people at Mothibi's to read. She is a clever girl, and has lived all her life on the station, and we doubt not will instruct them well.³⁶⁵

This letter makes it clear that the particular form of moral rigour required by the mission under Moffat's leadership remains in force. Significantly, as the final paragraph of the letter, cited above, indicates, the missionaries are beginning to lose their hold on the translated text. While the young woman referred to (a BaTlhapang “Eva”) may “instruct” others who do not live on the station in a manner that Mary Moffat imagines, the texts she takes with her will offer her a range of other possibilities as she begins to read them for herself among her own people.³⁶⁶ That she is a young woman is not incidental to the compromise between Mothibi's people's religio-cultural autonomy and their desire for strategic alliances with the missionaries. But it is her relative marginality within the patrimonial religio-cultural world of her own people that imbues this young African woman with the potential of being a herald of various African Christian trajectories: a neo-indigenous African biblical hermeneutics and Christianity shaped by missionary religio-cultural perspectives and a neo-indigenous African biblical hermeneutics and Christianity shaped by African religio-cultural perspectives (and everything in-between). I have included here ‘African biblical hermeneutics’ as a separable element in African appropriations of missionary resources. It is already clear that the Bible is separable, from the perspective of the Southern Tswana, from missionary Christianity, both in terms of what is proclaimed and what is practised.

364 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 181.

365 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 210–211.

366 For an account of “Tswana evangelists and their communities during the nineteenth century” see Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and Their Communities during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

Bible translation continues, despite the disruption in the interior. Mary Moffat, in letters to her father, dated April and March 1838, refers to the disruption to the interior wrought by waves of Dutch settler-farmers moving up from the Cape and the increasingly load borne by Robert Moffat at the mission. This dual burden has taken its toll on Moffat, she writes, who had “intended to finish the translation of the New Testament”, but who may “have to lay aside translation altogether, which would be much to be regretted, as his whole soul is in it; and any one who has witnessed the change among the Bechwana tribes since they got some portions of Holy Writ must feel anxious that they should have more”.³⁶⁷ But by the end of 1838 the New Testament is complete, and is taken by Moffat to Cape Town for printing, for “the printing was too heavy a task to be accomplished on the station”, and then on to England, for “[n]o office there [in Cape Town] was in a position to undertake book printing on the scale required”.³⁶⁸

However, because Moffat was “plunged into a whirlpool of public meetings” on his arrival in England, the printing of the New Testament was only begun in October 1838.³⁶⁹ The process included not only the correction of proof sheets, “but further revision of the text, for he was never satisfied with his work”.³⁷⁰ John Moffat, his son, then goes on to offer us a glimpse into Moffat’s linguistic capacities and other translation resources:

He was far more conscious than any one else could be of his deficiencies. When he went out as a missionary he knew nothing of the original languages. It was only by painfully laborious comparison of many authorities, and by collation of the Dutch with the English version, that he could satisfy himself of having grasped the meaning of the original; and having so grasped it, there was still the task of putting it into Sechwana. From the officials and committee of the Bible Society he had always the kindest sympathy and co-operation.³⁷¹

Having “grasped the [singular] meaning of the original”, Moffat’s rudimentary knowledge of the original biblical languages and of the receptor language were a cause of frustration, preventing him from declaring this “original” message to his African audience. This is clear in how Robert Moffat describes his own work. His theological agenda is also evident in the biblical texts he chooses

367 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 219.

368 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 221.

369 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 223.

370 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 226.

371 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 226.

to translate. So having translated, first, biblical texts related to the theological instruction of the Catechism, he then chooses, second, to translate the biblical gospel of Luke, probably because of its didactic pedagogical tone and its orientation to a 'gentile' audience:

For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed (Luke 1:1–4, KJV).

Third, the rest of the New Testament follows, and then, fourth, it is suggested to him while in London "that the Psalms would be a valuable addition".³⁷² As "[a] few of these had already been translated . . . when the New Testament appeared, the Book of Psalms was printed and bound up along with it".³⁷³ The theological logic is evident in this choice as well, as we have seen, with the Psalms, like the hymns, being used as a means of liturgical theological formation.

By 25 November 1840, when Mary Moffat writes to Robert Hamilton, the work on the Psalms is not quite complete.³⁷⁴ But by the end of 1840, when two new missionaries who "had been detailed to reinforce the Bechwana Mission, William Ross and David Livingstone",³⁷⁵ sailed for the Cape, "it was a great joy to Moffat to be able to send with them an instalment of good things, consisting of five hundred copies of the complete New Testament in the Sechwana language". And, she continues, "A few months later he had the still greater joy of sending out five times that number of Testaments, with which were bound up the Psalms".³⁷⁶

The missionary theological project is at the centre of Moffat's work, so "[s]carcely were the Psalms out of his hands when he undertook a revision of the Scripture Lessons, a selection from the Old and New Testaments,

372 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 226.

373 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 226.

374 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 229–230.

375 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 228–229.

376 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 231. "Towards the end of the year 1841, he managed to seclude himself for a time from public engagements, and to devote himself to the preparation of his book, the well-known 'Labours and Scenes in South Africa'; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 231.

suit to the circumstances of the Bechwana churches".³⁷⁷ On his return to the Kuruman mission, in December 1843, he continues with his mission work among "the influx of strangers and believers from the different out-stations", noting that Mothibi "had again been to Kuruman in our absence, when he was baptized".³⁷⁸ But the 'war' was not won, for, with respect to temporal concerns, Moffat writes, the "native villages" bordering the mission were "for the most part composed of round, conical huts, . . . with some more ambitious attempts at house-building in the shape of semi-European cottages",³⁷⁹ and with respect to eternal concerns, further afield "[a] severe contest was going on between heathenism and Christianity", with "[a] little company of believers" being gathered in the various outposts of "the Bechwana Mission" and being "ministered to by native teachers, who had spent a few months in training at Kuruman".³⁸⁰ "These people", writes John Moffat, reflecting on the years 1844–1847, "were feeling the pressure of the surrounding heathenism, and were proposing, in many instances, to remove to Kuruman. From this step they were persuaded by the missionary, who pointed out to them the value of their presence and testimony to the gospel in the midst of a heathen community".³⁸¹

In the decade between 1847 and 1857 the remainder of the Bible would be translated and earlier translations revised,³⁸² a period in which the Kuruman mission was "hemmed in and confined to the tribes which skirt the desert, whose country was not sufficiently attractive to the Boers so long as the fertile regions to the north-east had not been fully taken into possession".³⁸³ In a letter to a friend, dated 20 March 1851, Moffat writes that the work of translation continues, but that "progress is slow, very slow", hampered by the lack of "a competent amanuensis", "a sufficient quantity of type", and "also of compositors on whom we can depend".³⁸⁴ Later, however, he continues, "a new edition of Isaiah,³⁸⁵ Proverbs, and Preacher [Ecclesiastes] was turned off, but will not be bound up till the smaller Prophets are also printed. We have commenced the

377 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 231.

378 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 246.

379 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 253.

380 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 257.

381 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 257–258.

382 For a summary list see Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 28–29. See also Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 265, 313.

383 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 271; see also 289–293. This was to change in 1857–1858, when the Boers attacked the BaTlhaping and threatened the Kuruman mission; see Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 329.

384 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 281.

385 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 265.

Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy are ready. Numbers will be comparatively light work”.³⁸⁶ As John Moffat comments, what drives his father is a theological necessity, for “[a]s the unwearied translator remarks in one of his letters, each portion of the Scriptures as it came out seemed immediately to call for some additional portion to help in its explanation”.³⁸⁷ Again, the assumption that the Bible has a singular message is dominant, so that each part of the Bible must be translated so as to cohere with the other parts.

In a later letter, dated 30 October 1851, to the same friend, a Dr Bruce, Moffat explains something of his process of translation. This is as close as we get to an explanation:

To you I need not describe the extreme difficulty there is in translating that wonderful book, the book of God, into a language the capabilities of which have not yet been fully tested.³⁸⁸ While on the subject, let me tell you that at present (to-day) I am at the fourteenth verse of the twenty-first chapter of Numbers, where I came to a dead halt yesterday, and spent more than half the day on fourteenth and following verses, examining lexicons, versions, and commentators. You may guess the time it takes when I tell you that before I write down the shortest sentence I have to look to several translations of the Bible to see how each has it rendered. The Dutch is a valuable translation in coming nearest to the original. Sometimes the pen glides, and then again I am bewildered, and that frequently with passages which to a plain Bible reader would appear to be language in its simplest form; but this, of course, arises from the Sechwana. . . .³⁸⁹

The book of Numbers is not “lightwork” after all. Yet Moffat hardly ever acknowledges the difficulties of interpreting particular biblical texts or explains how he constructs a unified singular message from the diversity of the Bible. Furthermore, it is significant that there is no reference at all to local African collaborators in the translation process. Moffat does not draw into the translation process any of his target audience. He is still, after so many years, the lone crusader-translator, trusting only himself to be the arbiter of how to render both a particular biblical verse and the Bible as a whole. The effects of Moffat’s particular ideo-theological orientation on his translation and related

386 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 281.

387 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 269.

388 See also Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 314.

389 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 289.

African vernacular translations would be felt for years to come, as generations of Africans would, in the words of Musa Dube (herself a Motswana), in reading such missionary translations be “consuming a colonial time bomb”.³⁹⁰

But Moffat was oblivious to such potential effects. Realising, as he writes to his friend, that “[w]e cannot expect to see a redeemed, or rather a reformed, world”, the focus of his mission work has shifted to the Bible. “The Bible must be read in every language from shore to shore. We have this comfort, that we are preparing material for future aggression on Satan’s kingdom in this benighted continent”.³⁹¹ The Bible, via Moffat’s translation, is a weapon within the Christian warfare of mission.

The Bible becomes the focus because “with regard to the Bechwana Mission our present prospects are anything but bright”. He goes on to explain in a letter dated 20 August 1856 (the year before the “the whole Bible was in the hands of the Bechwanas in their own language”)³⁹² that, “This arises principally from the pressure of foreign influence. It is the time of ebb with us, and has been for some time past”. But there is also the pressure of local influence: “Few have been added to our churches, notwithstanding the increase of means in the way of books and, I might add, good congregations and attentive hearers. There is a general deadness over which we mourn”.³⁹³ So Moffat has set his hope on the translated Bible, for, he continues, “there is a large population speaking the language in which the whole of the oracles of God will shortly be printed”.³⁹⁴

What this large population of Africans will do with the Bible is the subject of the remaining chapters of this book. Just as Africans had controlled the missionary presence in the interior during this period, so they would take control of the Bible that the missionaries had translated while among them. We now leave the BaTlhaping and their Southern Tswana cousins of this period to follow them and other Southern Africans some years later as they appropriate the Bible, having stolen it from those who stole their cattle.

390 Dube, “Consuming a Colonial Time Bomb: Translating *Badimo* into ‘Demons’ in the Setswana Bible (Matthew 8:28–34; 15:2; 10:8),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 (1999).

391 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 289.

392 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 318.

393 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 316. Robert Moffat “preached for the last time in the Kuruman church” on the 20th March 1870; Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 363.

394 Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 316–317. Various portions of the Bible underwent revision on a regular basis, see Bradlow, *Printing for Africa*, 29, Moffat, *The Lives of Robert & Mary Moffat*, 353.

The Appropriated Bible

they bought a copybook and copied the whole Bible.¹

We follow the translated Bible along the well-worn paths of African migrant labour, as forms of British colonial and racial capitalism (1795–1890) and a related system of British colonial and mineral capitalism (1890–1948) gradually take hold of African peoples and land.²

More immediate local African contestations were also at play. For example, just to the north of Mothibi and his people, Moffat's meddling in the socio-political realities of the region had unintended effects within a landscape that Moffat little understood. While on a fourth visit to Mzilikazi of the Ndebele kingdom in 1857,³ among Moffat's reasons for this visit was securing the release of the neighbouring Ngwato people's Kgosi Sekgoma's senior brother, "who had been held captive after a raid some years earlier".⁴ "Naively believing", argues Paul Landau, "his mission to be one of peace, restoring a throne upended by regional warfare", Moffat's intervention provided an opportunity for Macheng, the senior brother, to enter into an alliance with Sechele of the BaKwena people, displacing Sekgoma from the Ngwato *kgotla*.⁵ Sekgoma and his royal household were forced into exile, moving to an area where his faction of the Ngwato royal house "entered into their first sustained exposure to Christian ideas and practices".⁶

The BaKwena had by this time themselves heard "many different kinds of messages", had begun to read the translated parts of the Bible for themselves, "refracting it all over again", forging their own neo-indigenous forms of African Christianity through "a series of collective and contradictory acts of

1 Hexham and Oosthuizen eds, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe: History and Traditions Centered on Ekuphakameni and Mount Nhlankakazi (Sacred History and Traditions of the AmaNazareth)*; Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 225.

2 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 15.

3 Moffat, *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 1829–1860* (Two vols.; vol. Two; Salisbury: National Archives of Rhodesia, 1976), 2–3, 135–138.

4 Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 9.

5 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 9.

6 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 10.

creation”, taking “what was alien into familiar societal roles and frameworks, which they then transformed or exploded”.⁷ This was the African Christian world that the eldest son of Sekgoma, Khama (born around 1835) grew up in,⁸ and where he and his family “continued to learn about *Lefoko la Modimo*, the Word of God”,⁹ constructing a neo-indigenous appropriation of this notion, combining elements of missionary associations of this term with the emerging associations surrounding the Setswana phrase as it was used by an emerging class of missionary-trained African evangelists (*baruti*) within the fluid continuum of *moruti-ngaka* (teacher of the Word-priest/healer).¹⁰

From this fecund religio-cultural and political-economic discourse and practice, Landau shows how “an originally tiny ‘Ngwato’ polity wrested a form of ecclesiastic statehood from the expressions and habits propounded by a missionary society, expanded its own tenuous loyalties into a kingdom, and flourished for decades in the environment of British imperialism”.¹¹ Central to this African Christian construction was the concept of ‘Word’, incorporating “a way people had of beholding the particular, integrative mode of power in the kingdom, which carried Christianity along with it”. “The Word”, Landau goes on to explain, “moved unevenly through the capital’s male royalty, among commoners of middling status, and especially, ramified amidst women. And it gave rise to an ideology of loyalty, status, civility, citizenship, and, ideally, a faithful Christianity”. “The ideology”, Landau continues,

not only spoken but worn in modes of dress, consumed in teas and soaps, and enacted in other behaviors, is best expressed as *thuto*, which is often glossed simply as ‘learning,’ more or less the import it has today. Yet *thuto* was an omnibus of meaning, allowing the interplay of imperial, local, and royal motives. With *thuto*, the Ngwato kingship proliferated and legitimated a realm of authority throughout the territory that the Bechuanaland Protectorate obligingly mapped for it.¹²

7 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, xxi.

8 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 7. It is Khama who is the primary protagonist of Landau’s book.

9 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 10. Landau speculates that Khama and his brother Kgamane “may also have had copies of Moffat’s New Testament”; Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 10, note 17.

10 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, 10–19.

11 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, xvi.

12 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, xvii.

This 'Word' or *thuto* is the subject of Paul Landau's careful study, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom*, that of the Ngwato kingdom, a kingdom from among the Southern Tswana. While Landau notes that "[e]xamining 'the interpretive situation' for how southern Africans read the Bible would surely be an interesting project",¹³ he himself does not focus on the kinds of biblical interpretation that undergird "the realm of the Word". However, his study provides the kind of 'thick' religio-cultural and political-economic account within which a more specific focus on the Bible would find fertile terrain.¹⁴ But this African polity is not the destination of this chapter.

Instead of following the Bible among those who stood within the (pluriform) tradition of *thuto*, we choose instead to reflect on 'the interpretive situation' of an African prophet and leader who located himself outside the domain of *thuto*. Isaiah Shembe is significant for our analysis precisely because he stands outside the isiZulu equivalent of *thuto*, distancing his emerging community from African *kholwa*-Christianity. Overt in his rejection of *thuto/kholwa* forms of Christianity, as well as the missionary-colonial forms of Christianity from which they had been forged, Isaiah Shembe nevertheless 'stole' their Bible. But before we come to a detailed study of Shembe's use of the Bible, we will consider an African theoretical frame within which we might consider Shembe's African biblical hermeneutics.

The Cultural Bible: African Culture as Africa's Old Testament

There has been substantial African reflection on African culture (and/as religion) as a preparation for the gospel and so as the bedrock of African Christianity/Christianities, with African culture (and/as religion) functioning as Africa's 'Old Testament',¹⁵ preparing the way for the gospel/New Testament. There has also been extensive conversation on the related topic of the resonances between African culture (and/as religion) and the Old Testament.¹⁶

13 Landau, *The Realm of the Word*, xxi, note 13.

14 The same could be said of the study by Volz, *African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and Their Communities during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

15 My use of the term 'Old Testament' in this chapter is therefore deliberate.

16 Holter, *Tropical Africa and the Old Testament* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1996); Holter, *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Holter, "Old Testament Scholarship in Sub-Saharan African North of the Limpopo

In both cases the Old Testament hovers in the background, much like “the spirit of God” in Genesis 1:2, as the prelude to ‘the real thing’, the gospel/New Testament.

Both discourses assume, at least, and often presuppose, a post-colonial stance. Here I deliberately reintroduce the hyphen in ‘postcolonial’ to signify the long tensive and resistant transactions that take place from the moment, different in different African contexts, that the missionary-colonial package shifts from an exploratory to an exploitative enterprise. In many parts of Africa, particularly in the African interior, at some remove from the more militant presence of empire on the coastal peripheries, Africans remained in control long after the edges of their continent had come under imperial mastery. But in most cases, and this was certainly the case in Southern Africa, the missionary-colonial presence on the coast reverberated across the hinterland, placing increasing pressure on spaces and peoples, and escalating conflict. Yet even in these decades of social flux, Africans controlled their territories and the missionary-colonial agents who ventured into them. It was only when diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) were discovered in the interior of Southern Africa that the interior itself became of substantive significance to imperial powers.¹⁷ What had been a slow creep of cautious, even fearful, encroachment into the African interior, now became a covetous rush to control these African lands and minerals and peoples. Now we can properly speak of conquest and colonialism. And it was precisely at this time, in the mid-1800s, in Southern Africa that the Bible became available in local languages,¹⁸ providing one more site of post-colonial contestation.

So we pause here to remind ourselves of that under theorised period of European presence in the African interior in which they were in control of very little. During this variable period, almost every aspect of their lives was under

River,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000); Holter, *Yahweh in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967–2000* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); LeMarquand, “A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).

- 17 Beck, “Monarchs and Missionaries among the Tswana and Sotho,” in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (eds. Elphick and Davenport; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 114.
- 18 Lubbe, “‘By Patience, Labour and Prayer. The Voice of the Unseen God in the Language of Bechuana Nation’. A Reflection on the History of Robert Moffat’s Setswana Bible (1857),” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 12(2009).

the control of Africans.¹⁹ But, unfortunately, we cannot linger too long here if we want to tell the story of the Bible in South Africa. For we must push on, along with the advancing missionary-colonial forces, to colonialism ‘proper’, and so to post-colonial forms of African engagement.

We must push on also because it is colonialism proper that is foregrounded in African reflections on the role of the Bible and the formation of the post-colonial African. As part of the imperial project of taking hold, quite literally, of African territories and resources, the colonial-missionary enterprise set about, as soon as it could, to prepare Africans for their entry into the Christian commonwealth, which included being inducted into God’s economic order. “Saving the savage meant teaching the savage to save”.²⁰ Africans, it was argued by Robert Moffat and others, must be taught to turn away from their inefficient mode of production so that, using God’s talents, they might bring forth the greatest possible abundance. “Only then would black communities be animated by the spirit of commerce that—along with the Gospel of Christ—promoted exchange on a worldwide scale. Only then might they be part of the sacred economy of civilized society”.²¹ For many a missionary, even the Nonconformist missionaries we have met in the interior of Southern Africa, the political economy was a form of ‘secular theology’,²² and so the missionaries set out to establish economic reform with religious zeal, persuading with word and deed Africans “to accept the currency of salvation, a task involving the introduction, along with the gospel, of market exchange, wage work, sometimes even a specially minted coinage”.²³

It was the regimes and routines of the missionary-colonial order of things that was most persistently resisted by Africans for as long as they could. As the old man from the BaTlhaping people, located in the interior of Southern Africa, told the missionary John Campbell in June 1813, “if they were to attend to instructions, they would have no time to hunt or to do any thing”.²⁴ He clearly understood that allowing the missionaries ‘to instruct them’ would immerse them in the time schedules and modes of production of the estab-

19 West, “Early Encounters with the Bible among the BaTlhaping: Historical and Hermeneutical Signs,” *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004).

20 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 166.

21 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 166.

22 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 166.

23 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 168.

24 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1815), 193.

lished mission stations, churches and schools to the south (in the Colony), whose “notions of time, work, and self-discipline were drawn from the natural lineaments of the industrial capitalist world”.²⁵

It was also this order of things that, when eventually implemented under colonial control, did the most damage, denigrating and destroying significant dimensions of African life. It is this recognition that haunts almost all African Christian theological and biblical discourse. Oddly, however, it is the Bible that is credited by a significant strand within African theology with restoring what has been damaged. But before we consider the contribution of the Bible, there is a prior move that this strand of African theology makes, namely that the very African culture (and/as religion) that missionary-colonial forces denigrated and destroyed is the vehicle for God’s revelation of ‘the gospel’ to Africans.

The African theological trajectory that considers African culture (and/as religion) as “a preparation for the Gospel” owes its impetus to John Mbiti, the Kenyan biblical scholar and theologian. Mbiti has been at the forefront of discussions about the continuities and discontinuities between ‘African Religion’—he prefers the singular though acknowledges that “it is not uniform throughout the continent”—and ‘Christian Faith’.²⁶ In a section entitled “African Religion as a preparation for the Gospel” of his 1976 address to the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA) in Nairobi, Mbiti argues that “African Religion made people to be disposed towards the Christian Faith”. “It is African Religion”, he continues, “which has produced the religious values, insights, practices and vocabulary on which the Christian Faith has been planted and is thriving so well today. The points of continuity between Biblical faith and culture and African Religion have been sufficiently strong for the Gospel to establish a strong footing among African peoples”.²⁷

Mbiti acknowledges the integrity of African Religion in its own right,²⁸ but stresses its preparatory role. “Although African Religion has been self-sufficient for many generations, it has nevertheless kept itself open enough to absorb and benefit from the new elements that the Christian Faith brings”. Indeed, he continues, it is African Religion that “has created a spiritual yearning,

25 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 179.

26 Mbiti, “Christianity and African Religion,” in *Facing the New Challenges: The Message of Pacla (Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly): December 9–19, 1976, Nairobi* (eds. Cassidy and Verlinden; Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1978), 309.

27 Mbiti, “Christianity and African Religion,” 311.

28 But see Opoku, “African Traditional Religion: An Enduring Heritage,” in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti* (eds. Olupona and Nyang; Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 69.

spiritual insights and sensitivities, which receive their ultimate satisfaction in the Gospel scheme". And while "African Religion could not produce that which the Gospel now offers to African peoples", yet, he argues, "it tutored them so that they could find genuine fulfillment in the Gospel".²⁹ The allusion here to the apostle Paul's argument in Galatians 3:24–25 is clear, though the weight placed on the second part of Paul's formulation in its application to African culture (and/as religion) is debated within this African theological trajectory: "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (NAS, 1995).

Drawing on Paul in another way, the West African theologian and scholar of religion Lamin Sanneh uses the story of Paul's proclamation of a correlation between the Athenian "unknown god" (Acts 17:23) and "the God of the risen Christ",³⁰ to argue that the proclamation of the missionary 'gospel', notwithstanding the damage its missionary-colonial incarnation has done, enabled Africans "to decode" their "religious instincts".³¹ In other words, "the truth" of "the gospel" was already within African culture (and/as religion), and had preceded the missionaries who proclaimed it.³²

While it is clear that Mbiti understands 'the Gospel' (always with capital 'g') as having a definable 'essence',³³ it is not always clear to what extent Sanneh and those who have followed his theological logic understand 'the gospel' to have a fixed content, activated and incarnated in a host of receptor cultures. What is clear for Sanneh is that "God was not disdainful of Africans".³⁴ Building on Sanneh's work, Kwame Bediako, another West African theologian, argues that this recognition

29 Mbiti, "Christianity and African Religion," 311.

30 Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 157.

31 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 157.

32 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 157.

33 Mbiti, "Christianity and East African Culture and Religion," *Dini na Mila* 3 (1968), cited in Bediako, "John Mbiti's Contribution to African Theology," in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti* (eds. Olupona and Nyang; Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 379–380.

34 Sanneh, "The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 4 (1983): 16, cited in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh and Maryknoll: Edinburgh University and Orbis, 1995), 120.

carried two far-reaching consequences for how one may view the African cultural world. First, [quoting Sanneh] “This imbued local cultures with eternal significance and endowed African languages [as the vehicles of this recognition] with a transcendent range.” And second, it also “presumed that the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor-culture”.³⁵

It is significant that it is West African scholars who have forged this theoretical perspective on ‘translation’ theology,³⁶ for there were many in the interior of Ghana who, like Mothibi and his people, had religio-cultural and political-economic time in which to prepare for their ‘colonial’ encounters with missionary-colonial forces, having access to translations of the Bible in their own vernacular languages before colonialism asserted its dominance.³⁷

It is important to note the centrality of the Bible in this process. But before we probe the Bible’s presence more fully, both Sanneh and Bediako are making a prior claim. Prior to the Bible’s presence, God was/is present in African culture (and/as religion), and it is God’s prior presence that allows for the potential of both mission and translation. In Sanneh’s formulation: “It is the hidden reality of this divine presence that both validates external mission and requires translation as a *sine qua non* of witness”.³⁸ In making this argument, Sanneh is concerned, insists Bediako, “to show not only that the crucial factors involved in the Gospel communication do not require the Western missionary transmitter to be at the centre of the picture, but also that African pre-Christian religions have had a theological significance in the whole process”.³⁹

Why the Bible plays such a prominent role in this process is that “[t]he enterprise of Scriptural translation, with its far-reaching assumptions about traditional religious categories and ideas as a valid carriage for the revelation and divine that precedes and anticipates historical mission, concedes the salvific value of local religions”.⁴⁰ “Vernacular agency”, says Sanneh, “became the preponderant medium for the assimilation of Christianity”, pushing

35 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 120.

36 Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 19–20.

37 See Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 39–58.

38 Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission,” 166, cited in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 120.

39 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 120.

40 Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission,” 170, cited in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 120.

missionaries into “a secondary position”, though this was not of course the missionary intention.⁴¹ However, because most missionaries, like Robert Moffat the translator of the first full Bible into a Southern African language, believed that “the simple reading and study of the Bible alone will convert the world” and that the task of the missionary therefore was “to gain for it [the Bible] admission and attention, and then let it speak for itself”,⁴² the missionary’s ‘subordinate’ position was “necessary and inevitable”, says Sanneh.⁴³

A dimension of subordination the missionaries might have expected was their subordination to the Word of God, the Bible (or, more accurately, their pre-understanding of ‘the Bible’s message’); the messengers should be secondary to the message. What would have been hard to come to terms with, however, was their increasingly secondary role to the Africans they came to instruct with the message. However, as Sanneh argues, “although missionaries had not intended to occupy a secondary position, their commitment to translation made that inescapable in the long term”.⁴⁴ Because the Bible was both produced by and its particular texts located within what Bediako refers to as “a primal world-view”, there was a substantial resonance between large parts of the Bible and the primal world-views of Africans. Drawing on Harold Turner’s characterisation of a primal world-view—including a recognition that humanity has a kinship with nature, a recognition of humanity’s finitude and creaturehood, a recognition of a spiritual world of powers and beings more powerful than humanity, a recognition that humanity can enter into relationships with the spiritual world, a recognition that there is continuity between this life and the afterlife, and a recognition that there is no boundary between the physical and the spiritual—Bediako argues that Africans shared a phenomenological relationship with the biblical world-view.⁴⁵

And while some African theologians have argued that this primal world-view was primarily preparatory, preparing Africans for ‘the Gospel’/Christianity, others like Bediako have argued that this primal world-view was/is also constitutive of African Christianity. John Mbiti, representing the former position, made a distinction between ‘Christianity’, which “results from the encounter of the Gospel with any given local society” and so is always indigenous and

41 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 162. See also Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From 1750 to the Present* (ed. Riches; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89–93.

42 Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), 618.

43 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 162.

44 Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” 91.

45 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 91–108.

culture-bound, on the one hand, and the Gospel, which is “God-given, eternal and does not change”, on the other.⁴⁶ “We can add nothing to the Gospel, for it is an eternal gift of God”, writes Mbiti.⁴⁷ In other words, for Mbiti ‘the gospel’ apprehended by Africans is substantially the same as that transmitted by the missionaries.⁴⁸ But for Bediako and Sanneh, the contribution of the African soil/soul is more distinctive. While not disputing significant continuity between what the missionaries proclaimed and what Africans appropriated, Sanneh asserts that “the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor-culture—so the missionary needs to discover Him in the new culture”.⁴⁹ In other words, for Sanneh ‘the gospel’ in any substantive sense is not fully understood until African voices have spoken, something Robert Moffat never grasped. “Bible translation breached the walls of missionary seclusion: if God could dispense with European languages, converts could dispense with missionary hegemony”.⁵⁰ What ‘the gospel’ is is always contested, precisely because post-colonial ‘others’ can and do speak (back). As we will see in the next chapter, it is this more radical elaboration of Sanneh’s claims that has been clearly articulated by South African Black Theology.

Returning to the scope of Sanneh’s argument, he insists that because “language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture”, the missionary decision to render the Bible in African vernaculars “was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenization far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western cultural imperialism”.⁵¹ For Sanneh, Bible translation is “a fundamental concession to the vernacular, and an inevitable weakening of the forces of uniformity and centralization”; translation introduces “a dynamic and pluralist factor into questions of the essence of the religion”. So, says Sanneh,

46 Cited in Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 117.

47 Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional Religions in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (1970): 438.

48 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 118.

49 Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission,” 166.

50 Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” 90.

51 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 3. Notwithstanding Moffat’s attempt to circumscribe and control ‘the message’, “the instrument that enabled local criticism to take root and flourish was”, as Sanneh says, “the translational machinery that mission had itself put in place”; Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 3. See also de Gruchy, “Reversing the Biblical Tide: What Kuruman Teaches London about Mission in a Post-Colonial Era,” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 12 (2009).

if we ask the question about the essence of Christianity, whatever the final answer, we would be forced to reckon with what the fresh medium reveals to us in feedback. It may thus happen that our own earlier understanding of the message will be challenged and even overturned by the force of the new experience. Translation would consequently help to bring us to new ways of viewing the world, commencing a process of revitalization that reaches into both the personal and cultural spheres.⁵²

Sanneh's emphasis here is on the agency of Africans as they engage with the Bible (as they also engage with missionary-colonial Christianity), both in terms of the content of the gospel, but also more significantly in terms of 'the shape' of the gospel.⁵³ We may discern two dimensions to Sanneh's argument here. The first dimension is the revitalisation of indigenous religion and culture. This occurs when the technical process of translation pushes indigenous respondents to reexamine their culture in order to assist the translators with appropriate language with which to translate biblical texts. This re-turn to local culture, a culture that has often been told by missionaries and other 'civilising' forces that it is inadequate at best and demonic at worst, revitalises the culture, as local respondents in the translation process reclaim aspects of their culture in order to provide a language for translation that is true to both the biblical text and their culture. And because there is so much 'primal' resonance between African culture (and/as religion) and the culture (and/as religion) of biblical communities and the texts they produced,⁵⁴ the scope for potential 'revitalisation' is substantial.

The second dimension is the potential of the receptor people to now add their own voices to the voices of the many other communities that have interpreted the Bible before them. If God really does speak the vernacular, then what is it that God is saying as understood by this new community? The very act of making the Bible available in the language of indigenous African peoples causes it to slip from or to be prised from the grasp of the missionaries who brought it. "If hearers of the Word of God in their own languages may then be presumed to respond in their own terms", argues Bediako, "this is another way of saying that it is not others' but their own questions which they would

52 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 53.

53 Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 14–17. This notion of 'the shape of the gospel' would become a key contribution of South African Contextual Theology.

54 Bediako, *Primal Religion and the Bible: William Robertson Smith and His Heritage* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

bring to the Bible, taking from it what they would consider to be *its* answers to their questions”.⁵⁵ We have seen Mmahutu do this; indeed, there are other elements here that resonate with what we have gleaned of the indigenous African engagement with Robert Moffat’s translation project, even though he does not recognise them and so does not draw attention to the African contribution to the BaTlhaping Bible.⁵⁶

We could go further, paying attention not only to the questions African bring to the Bible but also to what Africans do with the vernacular Bible. Bediako comes close to considering this question in his discussion of West African William Wade ‘Prophet’ Harris (1865–1929) of Liberia, “a trail-blazer and a new kind of religious personage on the African scene, the first independent African Christian prophet”.⁵⁷ Prophet Harris is significant for Bediako because he is “a paradigm of both a non-Western and essentially *primal* apprehension of the Gospel and also of a settled self-consciousness as African Christian, which is uncluttered by Western missionary controls”.⁵⁸ Speaking of Prophet Harris’ appropriation of the Bible, Bediako draws on the work of David Shank, who suggests that Prophet Harris was not so much concerned about ‘belief in’ the truth of the Bible but ‘participation in’ the truth of the Bible. It was not so much “a question of what Moses saw, or what Elijah did, or the words and works of Jesus as reported in the Bible”; it was more “a question of involvement—as with the ancestors, the living dead—with Moses, with Elijah, with the Archangel Gabriel, and supremely with Jesus Christ”.⁵⁹

Quite what the Bible is, altered with translation into African vernaculars. Prophet Harris from West Africa will be followed by a Southern African prophet some years later in the form of Isaiah Shembe, with whom we will be able to discern both that the Bible is altered and how it is altered.

55 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 63. I would place the emphasis, unlike Bediako, on ‘their’.

56 As Sanneh notes, “The vernacular Bible gave mission a necessary local orientation”; though unfortunately Moffat does not make use of this local orientation; Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” 93.

57 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 91.

58 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 91–92.

59 Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 104, citing Shank, “A Prophet for Modern Times—the Thought of William Wade Harris, West African Precursor of the Reign of Christ” (Aberdeen, 1980) 466.

The Liberating Bible: Isaiah Shembe's Bible

By considering another late nineteenth century African Christian prophet, Isaiah Shembe, we can probe more carefully not only what the Bible is for African Christians, particularly those who appropriated the Bible outside the control of missionary and settler Christianity in Southern Africa, but also what role the Bible played in 'preparing' the post-colonial African.

We begin, however, by returning to West Africa and the work of Lamin Sanneh. The theological trajectory founded by Mbiti,⁶⁰ given its 'translation' shape by Sanneh, theoretically elaborated by Kwame Bediako, and consolidated by Ogbu Kalu, emphasises that African Christianity "should be read as part and parcel of the organic growth and development of Africa's religious quest",⁶¹ and so the "'native' agency" of African Christianity.⁶² The 'translation' African theological strand reconfigures Christian mission by using the notion of 'reciprocity'. "We may characterize the ... interrelationship between missionaries and Africans as reciprocity", says Sanneh.

Missionaries paid huge 'vernacular' compliments to Africans, enabling many peoples to acquire pride and dignity about themselves in the modern world, and thus opening up the whole social system to equal access. For their part Africans returned the compliment by coupling a faith forged in the Scriptures with a commitment to social and political issues. Missionaries as vernacular agents thus helped Africans to become modernizing agents.⁶³

While there is no doubt that the translation of the Bible into a local African language, even today, recovers and codifies many aspects of that local African culture, some of which was in danger of being forgotten in the face of colonial modernity,⁶⁴ and enables local African communities to engage with the Bible

60 Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970), 36.

61 Clarke, "Ogbu Kalu and Africa's Christianity: A Tribute," *Pneuma* 32(2010): 109.

62 Kalu, "African Christianity: An Overview," in *African Christianity: An African Story* (ed. Kalu; Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005), 36.

63 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*: 172–17; see also Sanneh, "Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse," 98, 111. A similar assertion is made by Cherif Keita in his film on the relationship between the American missionary William Wilcox and the South African religious and political leader John Langalibalele Dube; Keita, "Cemetery Stories: A Rebel Missionary in South Africa," (Mogoya Productions, 2009).

64 Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 181, Sanneh, "Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse," 94–96; Yorke, "Bible Translation in Anglophone Africa and Her Diaspora: A Postcolonial Agenda," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2004).

on/in their own terms, the claim that vernacular Bible translation opens up “the whole social system to equal access” requires more critical analysis. The case of Isaiah Shembe offers a site for such analysis.

What is significant about Isaiah Shembe in the context of this book, which foregrounds African agency and control, is that he is from the beginning and remains throughout his life wary of missionary-colonial forces, as well as of their *kholwa* (missionary ‘converted’ and educated)⁶⁵ African offspring. While for Mbiti African Christianity is fundamentally a ‘biblical’ theology, he considered it vital that African Christianity remain in continuity with “the major traditions of Christendom” so that African Christianity was connected to “the mainstream of ecumenical and apostolic heritage”.⁶⁶ By contrast, Shembe deliberately locates his religion outside missionary-colonial and *kholwa* control, but firmly within the Bible, which results, ironically, in a far more ‘biblical’ theology than that of Mbiti. As we will see, the Old Testament is foundational to, and not merely a preparation for, Shembe’s construction of his ‘Christian’ community.

Isaiah Shembe was born into a Zulu polygamous family in the late 1800s. According to John Dube, Shembe was born in about 1867,⁶⁷ though Bengt Sundkler claims that he was born in 1870.⁶⁸ In this detail, Carol Muller reminds us, as with other details of his early life, we are dependent on oral testimony. She recounts one such testimony, which tells that

Isaiah Shembe’s father, Mayekisa, had had a dream in the early nineteenth century in which he had been told that he should move from KwaZulu Natal to the Free State province to avoid becoming a victim of Zulu king Shaka’s ruthless killing. Mayekisa Shembe went to Harrismith with the

65 I place ‘converted’ in inverted commas to problematise the notion of what we might understand by African ‘conversion’ to Christianity; see Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3–4; Landau, “‘Religion’ and Christian Conversion in African History: A New Model,” *Journal of Religious History* 23, no. 1 (1999).

66 Mbiti, *Prayer and Spirituality in African Religion* (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1978), cited in Bediako, “John Mbiti’s Contribution to African Theology,” 372.

67 Dube, *Ushembe* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1936).

68 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 10; see also Vilakazi, et al., *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 23.

knowledge that his then unborn son, Isaiah, would become a prophet in KwaZulu Natal (pers. comm., Patrick Ngubane, July 1997).⁶⁹

According to an interview with Isaiah Shembe himself in 1929, Shembe tells how he spent his early years on the farm of Buwelshoek in the Harrismith district, where his family seem to have been labour tenants.⁷⁰ Elizabeth Gunner explores this period of Shembe's life in some detail, for although Shembe's life before he founded Ibandla lamaNazareth in 1910 does not impinge directly on Shembe's teachings,

yet the influences from that quite lengthy period are worth exploring briefly as they help to explain the mix of emphases in his later ministry: the Zionist and Pentecostalist-derived absorption with the visionary and with faith healing; the emphasis on the importance of dreams, from both African traditional religion and Christianity; and finally, the firmness of purpose with regard to the need for writing.⁷¹

Ntabazwe (also known as Harrismith), Gunner notes, "always features as the first nodal point of Shembe's prophetic calling and is mentioned in all the accounts of his early life".⁷² The Wesleyan mission church for Africans there was "almost certainly", says Gunner, where Shembe "attended services and from where his love of Wesleyan hymns originated".⁷³ It seems too that Shembe also participated in preaching and healing in this church.⁷⁴ While living and working there, Shembe met the Reverend William Leshega, a Baptist minister who became "a mentor to the young Shembe".⁷⁵ Leshega baptised Shembe on the 22nd July 1906 and later returned to the region to baptise "those to whom

69 Muller, *Rituals of Fertility and the Sacrifice of Desire: Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25.

70 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God: Writings from Ibandla lamaNazareth, a South African Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 17.

71 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 17.

72 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 17.

73 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 18. See also "Shembe in the Wesleyan Church", a tradition recorded and recounted within *Ibandla lamaNazareth*, in Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 14–16.

74 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 18.

75 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 18. Carol Muller urges further research on Shembe's contact with these Baptists, for "the African Baptists were actually Africans from America sent to South Africa by the African Baptist Missionary Society"; Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 96.

Shembe had preached and in many cases healed”.⁷⁶ During this visit, Leshega “laid hands on Shembe and ordained him as a minister, authorising him to ‘preach to the nations and to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’”.⁷⁷ However, Leshega’s success as preacher and church planter, yet his independence of European control, led to him being driven out of the adjoining Witziesshoek area. This treatment of Leshega, Gunner suggests,

may have been crucial to Shembe’s formulation of his own ministry. Because although Leshega may never have been subjected to physical abuse, he certainly experienced the structural violence of a social and religious order that blocked him many times in his efforts to gain legitimacy as an ordained minister and in his efforts to gain land for his church.⁷⁸

Two other aspects of Leshega’s ministry may have impacted on Shembe, suggests Gunner. When Leshega came down again from his base in the Boksburg area to baptise Shembe’s converts, “he brought with him ‘two women ministers’ (*abafundisikazi ababili*)”, whose presence with Leshega may suggest, surmises Gunner, “some sort of gender equality in his church at the time”.⁷⁹ The other aspect of Leshega’s life that Gunner draws attention to in terms of its probable impact on Shembe’s emerging ministry is Leshega as “a tireless writer of letters and user of print”,⁸⁰ occupying the contested space “outside or on the very edge of the mission churches”.⁸¹

In Gunner’s analysis, another “influential presence” during Shembe’s time in Skomplaas (the African ‘section’ of Harrismith)⁸² and Ntabazwe, was Piet Sithole. Married to Shembe’s sister Aida,⁸³ he “was himself a powerful preacher and healer”, the founder and Archbishop of a Zionist church. His power and popularity, as with Leshega, led to confrontations with local colonial authorities, all of which would have made an impression on Shembe: “the evolving

76 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 20.

77 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 20, citing Dube, *Ushembe*, 28–29.

78 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 20.

79 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 19, citing Dube, *Ushembe*, 28.

80 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 20.

81 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 21.

82 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 17.

83 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 21.

pattern of Shembe's calling as healer and defier of a power he saw as intrusive has many associative echoes with that of Archbishop Piet Sithole".⁸⁴

These figures, and the many others "who bypassed the restrictive pressures of the white State and used miracles, visions and alternative readings of 'the Word' and the Bible to lead their people",⁸⁵ Gunner suggests, "may have given Isaiah Shembe important direction as to how he should structure his own path in the second place of his calling, the 'Holy City' of Ekuphakameni", on his return to KwaZulu-Natal.⁸⁶

Given this specific context and wider context of socio-political flux and instability that characterised this time—the Anglo-Zulu War, the Anglo-Boer War, the Bambatha Rebellion, the formation of the Union of South Africa—Isaiah Shembe 'returned' to KwaZulu-Natal as a particular manifestation of "a whole network of African evangelical activity existing outside or on the very edge of the mission churches", shaped by "whole corridors of influence, based on language corridors—Sotho in this case—sweeping down from the Transvaal, deep into the Orange River Colony, and bypassing formally or hegemonically instituted associations and power structures".⁸⁷ His response, argues Gunner, to "the radical dislocation of the early twentieth-century city, from which many who joined his church in the second decade of the century were seeking respite" was "to recreate the social group and to resituate its mental and material spaces".⁸⁸ More theologically, in the words of Carol Muller this time, "Isaiah's mission was to preach the word of God, as he found it in the mission Bible, to the traditional peoples, whom Western missionaries had had little success in convincing". Shembe believed, Muller continues, "that these people could be converted to Christianity and still retain their own cultural ways, many of which were reflected in the narratives of the Old Testament. He sought to unite all African people, regardless of ethnic or linguistic differences (Patrick Ngubane, pers. comm., July 1997)".⁸⁹

Muller goes on to say that oral accounts "suggest that Isaiah Shembe did not originally intend to establish his own church in opposition to the European mission. Initially, he encouraged those he healed and converted to join estab-

84 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 21.

85 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 21.

86 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 22.

87 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 21.

88 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 23.

89 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 25. Muller is drawing here on the work of Roberts, "Shembe: The Man and His Work" (Master of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, 1936).

lished mission communities (pers. comm., Bongani Mthethwa, June 1991)". However, Muller continues, "as a consequence of the 1910 Union, the effects of the iniquitous 1913 Natives Land Act, and the pleas of his followers",⁹⁰ Isaiah Shembe established a place in which the "theatre of memory"⁹¹ he was constructing could take on a visible form:

He established *Ekuphakameni* (the place of spiritual upliftment) on thirty-eight acres of land in the Inanda Native and Mission Reserve. *Ekuphakameni* became the headquarters of the Nazareth Baptist Church in about 1916. On this site, Isaiah's followers gradually built an entire village, including a school, a store, places of worship, gardens, and extensive dwellings for married and single women and men, as well as young girls and boys. By the time of his death in 1935, Isaiah Shembe had purchased more than twenty pieces of land in KwaZulu Natal.⁹²

Within an unstable context constituted by sustained transactions between traditional Nguni culture, European colonialism, missionary Christianity, and an emerging industrial capitalism—over whose political and economic dimensions Shembe and his followers exercised little control—Isaiah Shembe constructed and attempted to control the religio-cultural dimension and in so doing tried to reassert some sense of religio-cultural and political-economic integrity (and so identity).⁹³ Put differently, he was forced "to create his own world and to inhabit it".⁹⁴

Among the many things Shembe may have learned from his association with Leshega were the constraints of *kholwa* Christianity, as well as both the limits and potential of writing in contending with colonialism. Gunner emphasises the role literacy plays in Shembe's construction of community "in negotiating various forms of modernity and in attempting to counter the power of the state's writing"; but she recognises too that Shembe would also have understood the limits of literacy and how 'writing' "may also need to co-exist alongside and to intersect with others forms of experience, such as the visionary and

90 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 26.

91 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 23.

92 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 26.

93 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 26–53.

94 Vilakazi, et al., *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society*, 10; Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, xviii–xix.

the revelatory dream”, key features in her analysis of Shembe’s “making of his church”.⁹⁵

So while writing “was always a critical element in Shembe’s enterprise”, this writing “existed outside the ambit of the new [*kholwa*, missionary educated] African elite”.⁹⁶ As Joel Cabrita notes in her study, Shembe “affirms the value of writing and alludes to the capacity of texts to create and shape human communities”, reconfiguring the very notion of ‘writing’ and ‘text’.⁹⁷ In a parable told by Shembe, recorded by Petros Dhlomo, who gathered such material from Shembe’s community when he became the archivist of the Nazareth church in the 1940s until his death in the 1990s, and cited by Cabrita,⁹⁸ Shembe draws on a biblical image from the apostle Paul, who writes to the church in Corinth, saying, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:2–3; NAS, 1995). Citing and re-writing Paul, Shembe tells the following parable:

The lord [Shembe] said these words in the village of Ekuphakameni [the sacred place of the amaNazareth]. You are a letter which is not written with ink but with diamonds which cannot be erased and is read by all people (11 Cor. 5:1–3) [sic]. It is not written on flat stones. Rather it is written in your hearts. When the people of the system will come and take these letters of which the children here at Ekuphakameni are singing and when they will say: “You see all that Shembe was preaching has come to an end then even a child of Ekuphakameni could say: ‘We greet you, Kuphakama; we greet you, Judia’” (No. 6 in the *Hymn Book of the amaNazareth*). These things which were spoken at Ekuphakameni are written in the hearts of the people who love God (Malachi 4:2, 3).⁹⁹

Intriguingly, though the direct reference is to 2 Corinthians 2:2–3, the cited reference to 2 Corinthians 5:1–3 may be a deliberate though oblique reference

95 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 22.

96 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 26, 27.

97 Cabrita, “Texts, Authority, and Community in the South African Tbandla lamaNazareth” (Church of the Nazareth), 1910–1976,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40 (2010): 60.

98 Cabrita, “Texts, Authority, and Community,” 60.

99 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 211 (§143). Cabrita has emended the text so that it reads: “You see all that Shembe was preaching has come to an end”. Then even a child of Ekuphakameni could say: “We greet you at Kuphakama; We greet you Judia (Hymn 6)”. Cabrita also emends ‘letter’ to ‘book’ in both cases.

to the kind of community that is being constructed: “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked” (NAS). We may have here an indication of how biblical citations are deployed by Shembe, with an expectation that his Bible ‘literate’ congregation-community (*ibandla*) would connect with both the uncited citation and the cited allusion.

Cabrita does not probe the biblical citations and other possible biblical allusions, but she does capture rather well the import of this parable with respect to writing.

In Dhlomo’s text Isaiah [Shembe] speaks of the threat of the European state, the “people of the system”, destroying the church’s texts and in particular the body of hymns that were circulating in both oral and written form by the mid-1920s—“the books from which the children at Ekuphakameni are singing”. Yet Isaiah affirms that if this were to happen, the true book of the church would be the Nazaretha community itself. The power of the written word can conjure up communities of people as enduring records; Isaiah tells the congregation at Ekuphakameni that a virtuous Nazaretha life is itself a written record for posterity. Isaiah presents Nazaretha lives as an enduring text written in “diamonds”, not written on a physical surface but “in your hearts”. Dhlomo’s text suggests that Nazaretha writing creates a group of people connected by the common inscription of Isaiah’s words on their hearts. Both Isaiah’s spoken words and Dhlomo’s recording of the parable affirm the power of writing to create enduring memory. This presents writing not only as a rational technology of pen and paper, but ultimately as a spiritual inscription “in the hearts of the people who love God”. Writing, then, for both Isaiah Shembe and Dhlomo as archivist, proclaims the power of texts to generate cohesive communities that are able to withstand the incursion of the state.¹⁰⁰

Important as writing in general is for Isaiah Shembe, the focus of this chapter is a particular text, the Bible, and its place in Shembe’s reformation of “institutions of memory” as he “provided multiple means to ‘practise’ memory” and “set up the cultural means and the institutions through which specific practices of memory were mediated”.¹⁰¹ As Gunner reminds us, Shembe’s (successful) attempt “to constitute a theatre of memory” was “his response on one level

100 Cabrita, “Texts, Authority, and Community,” 61.

101 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 22.

to the radical dislocation of the early twentieth-century city, from which many [mainly women]¹⁰² who joined his church in the second decade of the century were seeking respite". Shembe's answer, continues Gunner, "was to recreate the social group and to resituate its mental and material spaces".¹⁰³ Shembe saturated this social project in the Bible, having seized it from the missionary-colonial agents who brought it, recounting in another parable how this was accomplished.

Again, Petros Dhlomo, the great collector and historian of Isaiah Shembe's life and ministry,¹⁰⁴ tells the story of Shembe's sermon in the home of Ndllovu, "the headman of Zibula at Lenge, in the year 1933",¹⁰⁵ in which Shembe tells the story or "The Parable of the Liberating Bible".¹⁰⁶ Dhlomo frames the story as follows:

1.1 The man of God, Shembe, came to the home of Ndllovu the headman of Zibula at Lenge, in the year 1933, and there he said these words in his sermon in the evensong: [Shembe began, saying] "In olden times there were two might[y] nations who were fighting over a certain issue. In their war the one conquered the other one and took all their cattle away. They took even their children captive and put them into the school of the victorious nation among them also three sons of the same mother. They were given some work to do in the morning before they went to school. They had to sweep the houses of their teachers and the house of the Pope".¹⁰⁷

Re-membering in his own terms the Southern African story of conquest, Shembe begins with the 'taking' of African cattle and African children. Significantly, the children are put in school. The story continues with a focus on three of these 'en-schooled' children, "three sons of the same mother". Among the tasks given to these children was that they "had to sweep the houses of their teachers and the house of the Pope". The menial work the African children do is work within the rhythms and systems of the victorious nation, though it is not clear whether

102 A 1921 report on Shembe estimated that 95 per cent of his followers were female; Cabrita, "Isaiah Shembe's Theological Nationalism, 1920s–1935," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 618, footnote 58.

103 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 23.

104 Papini, "Introduction," in *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings* (eds. Papini and Hexham; Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), xiii–xiv.

105 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 224.

106 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 224 (§152).

107 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 224–225.

there is a distinction between the the “three sons of the same mother” and the other children. Was it only these three that had to perform menial labour in the houses of their conquerors? While this is not clear, Shembe’s focus is clear, it is on these three children precisely because they have access to the masters’ houses, particularly the house of the Pope.

Shembe continues his parable, narrating that,

1.2 “All these children made good progress in school and passed their examinations well. Then they were trained as bishops. In the house of the Pope there was a Bible which was kept under lock by him and only read by himself. On a certain day he [the Pope] had to go for a few weeks to another place and he forgot to lock the Bible up at home. When the boys were sweeping his home they found the Bible unlocked. When they began to read it they discovered that their nation which had been demolished so badly by the war could never be restored unless they would get a book like this one and they considered what to do”.¹⁰⁸

It is now clear that Shembe is referring to African *khulwa* Christianity. However, Shembe continues, there was a certain book that was locked away from the children. Children of the conquered nation had access to some of the books of the victorious nation, thereby allowing them to rise to the level of bishops. But the Pope alone had access to one special book. This, it becomes clear, is the Bible: “In the house of the Pope there was a Bible which was kept under lock by him and only read by himself”. The boys begin reading the locked-away book, the Bible, in the house of the master of the masters, the Pope. Reading the Bible confirms the value of this book, for, “When they began to read it they discovered that their nation which had been demolished so badly by the war could never be restored unless they would get a book like this one”. The parable moves towards its climax as Shembe relates how,

1.3 “When they came back from school they bought a copybook and copied the whole Bible. When they had finished their work, they returned the Bible to its place. Thereafter the Pope came back and saw that he forgot to lock his Bible in. He called the boys who worked in his house and asked them whether they had opened this book. They denied it and said that they did not see that it had not been locked up. Then he forgot about it. The boys considered how they could bring this book to their parents at home.

108 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225.

1.4 At another day, they went and asked permission to visit their parents at home. They were permitted to go and they were given a time by which they must be back. When they came home, they did not stay there, rather they went from home to home and preached about this book until their time of leave was over and policemen were sent to look for these boys. Then they left this book there and returned to school".¹⁰⁹

That Shembe is concerned about 'restoration', the rebuilding of African community is clear. What is also apparent is that Shembe recognises that the restoration will be of another form of African community, a post-conquest post-colonial post-missionary form of African community. And Shembe recognises too that certain resources of the conquering nation are required for the restoration of post-colonial post-missionary African community. That the Bible is brought to the African parents of the (partially) educated African children, parents whom we must assume have not been educated by the missionary-colonial system, is significant, for it is these African elders who have the historical and local African resources necessary for restoration of African community—together with the Bible.

But the (partially) educated African children play an important role, for not only do they have the capacity to recognise the distinctive power of this hidden book, they also have the capacity to copy it, a capacity they have obtained from the missionary-colonial system. That they are resisting African children is also evident, for they subvert the system that has captured them, and they understand the importance of bringing the copied stolen Bible to their parents. The boys, it should be noted, do not return willingly to the missionary-colonial school, they have to be forced to return. What they leave behind in their own community is both the written and the oral-aural 'word'. Missionary-colonial power holds the Africans it has conquered under coercive surveillance, but the partially educated African children are able to evade this surveillance, both within and without the centres of power, for periods of time. Surveillance and control are never total.

Having established a(n) (equivalent?) relationship between the cattle the conquerors took and the Bible the servant boys took, Shembe's parable now shifts to what appears to be a catechetical exercise to which the boys are subjected on their return to school.

109 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225.

1.5 “After their return, they had to answer questions. They were asked, ‘Do you believe that Thixo [God] can only be found in the Roman Catholic Church?’ It was expected that all of them should say so. But the oldest boy did not. Rather he said: ‘I believe that Thixo can be found in all beings on earth’. They were greatly startled by these words and they told him to move to the side. Then they called the second boy. He also said the same words: ‘Thixo is in all things on earth’. Then they called the third one and he said the same words.

1.6 Then they admonished the boys and said: ‘You see, what you have said is deeply contradicting this doctrine, in which you have been instructed; this our teaching in which you have been brought up you should follow together with the others. But should you desert from this doctrine in which you have been educated you will be burned by fire. Now go and sleep and consider this matter well’.¹¹⁰

It would seem that this kind of catechetical instruction was routine. What is different now is that these three boys have read the Bible for themselves. The Bible enables them to reject their catechetical instruction, for the Bible confirms their own African experience that God can indeed “be found in all beings on earth”. Shembe makes it clear, however, that, “It was expected that all of them” should conform to their catechetical instruction. However, “the oldest boy did not” conform. Having read the Bible for himself he is able to say with confidence: “I believe that Thixo can be found in all beings on earth”. The masters were “greatly startled by these words”, and he and the other boys, who answer similarly, are threatened with death by burning, with hell, if they persisted in “contradicting this our doctrine, in which you have been instructed”. The masters make no attempt to turn to the Bible in their interrogation; their catechism has priority, not the Bible.

Affirming the presence of Thixo among all peoples and thereby the dignity of his own particular people, the oldest boy refuses to submit to the formulaic kind of Christian faith Robert Moffat proclaimed among the BaTlhaping, notwithstanding the threat of the fires of hell. And the courage of the older boy enables others to make a similar resisting response. Ironically, the deconstruction of the instruction is the ‘faithful’ response—being faithful to the Bible—but the missionary-colonial instructors are unable to recognise this.

110 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 225–226.

1.7 “On the following day they were called again. When they asked the first boy he repeated what he had said on the previous day. They brought him outside and showed him the fire. He sang the hymn: ‘Our Father in Heaven look at me with your love and do not look (at my sins) with which I have come and which make me ashamed. I was born with them and I do not hide one of them’. So he went into the flames and was burned. When the second one was questioned, he repeated the same words which he had said on the previous day. They showed the fire also to him and said: ‘Enter there where your brother went in and follow him’. This second boy shouted: ‘Holy, holy, holy!’ And he ran quickly into the flames and was burned”.¹¹¹

The masters hoped that fear of the fire would coerce these three boys to conform to the catechism. But even after a night’s reflection the first boy again refuses to follow what he has been taught, repeating “what he had said on the previous day”. And when faced with “the fire”, he sang a hymn and “went into the flames and was burned”. In this parable the flames of the eternal hell of Moffat’s message have become part of temporal reality. Significantly, the first boy sings a hymn before entering the fire. Again, his response is a faithful response, singing a hymn that draws on the language of the biblical Psalms (eg. Psalm 32, 51) and Matthew’s gospel (eg. Matthew 6:9). The irony is palpable; the young African boy is faithful both to the Bible and Bible-based hymns, and yet he is consigned to the fire because he is considered unfaithful to the missionary-colonial ‘school’ faith he has been taught. Significantly, the hymn that the first boy sings is not a missionary-*kholwa* hymn, it is a hymn given to and composed by Isaiah Shembe, an heir of the stolen Bible:

*Baba wethu oseZubwini
Ngibheke ungithande
Ungazibheki engize nazo
Zingijabhisile.*

Chorus:
*Zazabwa kanye nami
Anginakuthukusa nasinye.*

Our Father who is in heaven
Look at me with love

111 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 226.

Do not look at [the sins] I come with
They make me ashamed.

Chorus:

They were born with me
I cannot hide even one (Hymn 35).¹¹²

The second boy too cites the Bible, quoting from the book of Revelation, repeating the words of the wondrous “four living creatures” who “day and night . . . do not cease to say, ‘holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the almighty, who was and who is and who is to come’” (Revelation 4:8, NAS) as he enters the flames. By choosing to enter the flames rather than recanting these two boys expose the contradictions at the heart of missionary-colonial-*khohwa* Christianity. They stand with the Bible over against missionary-colonial-*khohwa* Christianity.

But the parable of the liberating Bible does not end here. For when the third boy is questioned he responds differently.

1.8 “When the third one came in to be questioned his mother appeared and said: ‘Oh, my child what is wrong that all of you should die on the same day? Would it be so very wrong to say that Thixo belongs to the Roman Catholics, so that your life may be spared and that I may retain you on earth?’ The youngest son saw the point and followed the advice of his mother. He said, ‘I believe that Thixo is found in the Roman Catholic Church only’.

1.9 Then the Pope said that they should bring a book where he should write these words down and make an affidavit. This he did. When he slept in the night his spirit was taken up and brought to the joyful place of the selected ones. He heard a wonderful singing from a certain place and when he looked there he saw a large crowd of people who were clad in white gowns, on the other side of the river. When he looked intensely he saw there his two brothers with whom he had been together and who were burned by the fire.

1.10 He wanted to go to them. But a voice said: ‘You cannot go to your brothers. Because they died for the promise while you did not die for it’. Then this boy wept bitterly until the morning dawned and even when he had risen he did not cease weeping. He went to the Pope and said to

112 I am grateful to Nkosinathi Sithole for identifying this hymn for me, and for his translation.

him: 'I was wrong when I said that Thixo is found in the Roman Catholic Church only and when I wrote that affidavit. Rather Thixo is there in all things on earth'.

1.11 The Pope said: 'I do not know what I should say, because this comes from your heart. What do you say?' He replied: 'It would be better that the Pope would cut off this my hand by which I wrote'. The Pope said: 'No, I cannot do that. I do not have the authority to do so even with your permission'. Then this boy went to that place where the fire was burning on the previous day and where his brothers had died. He stirred it up again with his hand, and when the fire was burning he burned himself to death.

1.12 But the lord said: 'This does not help you either because it has not been done by others to you. You did it by yourself. You separated from your brothers when they died and you chose for yourself to live'.¹¹³

The intervention of the mother shifts the focus of the parable. Understandably, having lost two sons to the fire, the mother intervenes, persuading her third son that it would not be so wrong "to say that Thixo belongs to the Roman Catholics, so that your life may be spared and that I may retain you on earth". He follows her pragmatic advice, saying what is required of him. But the Pope demands more, requiring not only oral but written assent, saying "that they should bring a book where he should write these words down and make an affidavit", which he did.¹¹⁴ Writing, it would seem, mediates between the temporal and the eternal. Shembe, like his mentor Leshega, understands the role that legal 'text' plays in the maintenance of the missionary-colonial-*kholwa* system.

That night, when the third boy slept, "his spirit was taken up and brought to the joyful place of the elected ones. He heard a wonderful singing from a certain place and when he looked there he saw a large crowd of people who were clad in white gowns, on the other side of the river", where "he saw his two brothers". But when he "wanted to go to them", a voice said to him, "You cannot go to your brothers. Because they died for a promise while you did not die for it".¹¹⁵ Shembe is almost certainly alluding here to the parable that Jesus tells in Luke 16:19–31, though he reconfigures certain elements. But the overall thrust is the same as that of the parable Jesus tells, in which God and the angels say to the faithless and unjust one: "between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not

113 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 226–227.

114 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 226–227.

115 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 227.

be able, and that none may cross over from there to us" (Luke 16:26, NAS). The reference to "a large crowd of people who were clad in white gowns" alludes to Revelation 7:9–17, where there is "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes" (Revelation 7:9, NAS), who are then identified as "the ones who come out of the great tribulation, [who] . . . have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14, NAS).

Unable to join his brothers in heaven because of his words, both spoken and written, the third son is distraught. But even his attempts to recant are rebuffed by the Pope. Through his words, both spoken and written, he has changed his destiny. Unable to live "on earth" (as his mother wanted) knowing that he has betrayed his brothers and the Bible, the third son destroys first the hand with which he wrote and then his whole body in the fire. But even that is not enough to unite him with his brothers and the "large crowd of people who were clad in white gowns". For "the lord" has the final word, saying: "This does not help you either because it has not been done by others to you. You did it by yourself. You separated from your brothers when they died and you chose for yourself to live". Though this 'lord' could be Shembe, it is more likely to be God, for in the next paragraph of the parable there is a clear designation of Shembe. God speaks directly to the third son, excluding him from among those who have been persecuted for their faith by the empire, whether the Roman empire of the book of Revelation or the Dutch and British empires of Shembe's South Africa.

At this point the parable of the liberating Bible shifts from parable to sermon:

1.13 "The lord of Ekuphakameni [Shembe] said: 'The death of the young man did not help him in any way. He did not go to the place where his brothers were because he did not die for the promise. Now I speak no longer of these people. Rather I speak today to you people of Ekuphakameni. You have been told that a young man of Ekuphakameni should never write a letter to a maiden of Ekuphakameni and a maiden of Ekuphakameni is not allowed to write to a young man of Ekuphakameni. I ask you: what kind of a Bible do you write? Because you will suffer very much on the Last Day. And when you will then come to me and say: 'Our father, I wish to enter the Kingdom'. Then I shall be unable to do anything because you have broken the law of which you were told not to break it'.¹¹⁶

116 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 227–228.

A remarkable parable is appropriated in what is at first glance an enigmatic sermon. The Bible is clearly appropriated by Shembe as a text of power, which is why it must be stolen. But once stolen, copied, and shared with the community its message is quite different from 'the instruction' of missionary-*kholwa* Christianity. And yet Shembe requires of his followers a similar obedience to "the law" as that demanded by the Pope. Indeed, law is a key feature of Shembe's new community, and laws on the relationship between men and women, alluded to in the sermon, are central tenets of 'the law'.

The Oral/Aural Bible: Shembe's Law

If recognising the power of the Bible is a first move in Shembe's biblical hermeneutics, and seizing it by stealth his second move, then the third distinctive move (reminiscent of Prophet Harris) Shembe makes is his engagement and participation with the major characters of the Bible, especially Moses from the Old Testament and Paul from the New Testament. Among the 'texts' associated with Isaiah Shembe are a genre known as *imithetho*/laws. 'Laws' form a considerable part of the corpus of Shembe's 'writings',¹¹⁷ and the use of this term may well allude to 'the law of Moses'.

Significantly, those sections in one of the notebooks, the use of which was encouraged by Shembe among his followers, that include the designation 'law' are about marriage and adultery; indeed, many of Shembe's instructions are about the relations between men and women.¹¹⁸ So the shift in Shembe's story about the stolen Bible from the three young boys who stole the Bible to the issue of young men and women writing to each other is not a tangential topic. The Bible is for Shembe extensively about law, and law is primarily about how the community should govern the relationships between men and women.

While the oral record indicates that Shembe did not intend to start a church, Carol Muller notes that "his growing following of women, young girls, and orphans persuaded him to provide a space of sanctuary for them",¹¹⁹ so he 'obtained' land, sometime between 1911 and 1916.¹²⁰ On this site, called

117 It is not clear to what extent Shembe was literate (see below), and his 'writings' are all produced by his followers, much like 'the writings' of Jesus.

118 West, "Reading Shembe 'Re-Membering' the Bible: Isaiah Shembe's Instructions on Adultery," *Neotestamentica* 40, no. 1 (2006).

119 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 19.

120 Muller indicates the dates of 1915 or 1916, and states that he "purchased" the land "using money given to him by those he had healed"; Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in*

Ekuphakameni, says Muller, “Shembe established what became the headquarters of a large and powerful religious community”. How he did this, she continues, was by “[c]ombining his deep knowledge of the mission Bible with his respect for Nguni traditional ways, and with some knowledge of commodity capitalism”. Reconfiguring these resources “he constituted a new and hybrid regime of religious truth . . . in competition with ideologies of the state and the Christian mission”.¹²¹

From Mullers’ analysis we can discern at least three narratives which Shembe reconstituted into a fourth, dealing directly with the female body. The first is the narrative of Zulu traditional religion and life. In the African pre-colonial homestead economy women played a central but highly circumscribed role.¹²² As Muller notes, marriage was the most important social institution in this economy.¹²³ Marriage enabled “both the productive and reproductive units of the homestead, and facilitated the transfer of property from the household of the man’s family to that of the women’s”, usually through the system of the exchange of cattle (known as *lobola*).¹²⁴ In Jeff Guy’s analysis, used by Muller, he suggests that, “The object of accumulation in southern Africa’s precapitalist societies was indeed cattle, but cattle as the means by which men acquired and accumulated the labor power of women”.¹²⁵ Muller elaborates, saying,

A man’s wealth was, therefore, determined by his accumulation of women, their labor, and children. For this he required cattle, which in turn created surplus through reproduction of the species. Since marriage was the institution that legitimated the sexual relations of the man and woman, and thus the birth of children, the fertility of women was crucial to the productive and reproductive capacities of the structures of the pre-capitalist African homestead.¹²⁶

The second narrative is of Shembe’s particular context in the early 1900s, a context in which African women were particularly at risk. The African homestead

South Africa, 19. However, oral re-membling indicates a date of 1911, and insists that the land was donated to him by an Indian; personal communication, Rev F.I. Mgidi, 29 July 2015.

121 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 19.

122 Guy, “Gender Oppression in Southern Africa’s Precapitalist Societies,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa until 1945* (ed. Walker; Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 34.

123 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 27.

124 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 27.

125 Guy, “Gender Oppression in Southern Africa’s Precapitalist Societies,” 40.

126 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 28.

economy came under massive pressures, brought about both by the colonial encounter and by internal conflicts within African chiefdoms.¹²⁷ From the 'concubinage' of individual European traders to the more systematic colonial devastation of the African homestead through annexation of African land (in 1844), the removal of Africans from their land (between 1846–1847) to demarcated Reserves, their subjugation to unwritten customary 'Native Law' under the control of colonial agents, and the colonial surveillance and taxation of the African population in the reserves, colonial forces combined in the destruction of this precolonial socioeconomic form.¹²⁸

The pressures on the homestead economy were massive; taxation eroded the cattle-centred economy, forcing young men to leave their land and cattle and to migrate to the mines and cities in order to earn the money to pay these taxes; and colonial and Union legislation removed more and more land from the African populations, keeping women on increasingly barren reserve land.¹²⁹ The result of the collapse of the homestead economy for many women, whether from the direct consequences of colonial policy or from the indirect consequences of internal African inter-clan conflict (usually exacerbated by colonial encroachment), was migration, following their men to the cities where wage labour, domestic service in white homes, or sex-work were the most viable options.

Within this mix, mission Christianity made its own contribution, and so added a third narrative. While conversion to missionary Christianity was slow in the mid-1870s, there were a number of factors that led local Zulu people to the mission stations. Missions were allocated large pieces of land in the Native Reserves, where they "encouraged the formation of self-sufficient, petty commodity-producing units based in the nuclear household and on family labor".¹³⁰ Mission stations, as we have seen with the Kuruman mission, therefore, offered an alternative economic base to those who had been driven off their land, either through direct colonial intervention or through more local upheavals. Mission land was offered for agricultural production. Furthermore, missionaries received and welcomed all those "who had been ostracized or marginalized

127 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 32.

128 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 38.

129 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 38–39.

130 Meintjes, "Family and Gender in the Christian Community at Edendale, Natal, in Colonial Times," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa until 1945* (ed. Walker; Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 132.

by their own communities. This was particularly important", Muller argues, "for women who wished to escape arranged marriages or to acquire land".¹³¹

However, for African women, Muller argues, "conversion to Christianity offered a contradictory package. It created a dialectical tension between breaking free of precolonial traditions and courting the patriarchy and domesticity of colonial Christianity".¹³² Missionary Christianity offered a place to African women, but drastically reconfigured this place, discouraging African women from their accustomed agricultural production (insisting that it was more appropriate for the men to till and plough the fields), and undermining (in alliance with the state) polygamy and *lobola*.¹³³

This brings us to a fourth narrative, a hybrid narrative constructed by Shembe from elements of each of the three narratives.¹³⁴ As Muller argues, "Deeply disturbed by these events, Isaiah Shembe established a place of spiritual and economic refuge for widows, orphans, and those women previously in polygamous marriages whose husbands had converted to mission Christianity, a belief system that insisted on monogamous alliances". "Shembe created", she continues, "this hybrid religious community from the substance of archaic Nguni and biblical beliefs about women, virgin girls, and their bodies. In so doing, he reconstituted a sense of order, religious sanctuary, and ritual power by reinventing the feminized notion of cyclicity, a central principle of traditional performance, agricultural method, and cosmological understanding".¹³⁵ Using a similar form of analysis Joel Cabrita argues that Shembe's community's "distinctive social grammar" rested "on idioms of health, healing, and ritual performance" and drew heavily "on the symbolic capital gained from attracting female adherents".¹³⁶

Shembe "authorized these practices" by appropriating biblical narrative, particularly prominent biblical characters like Moses and Paul. Having stolen the

131 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 40; see also Etherington, "Christianity and African Society in Nineteenth Century Natal," in *Natal and Zululand from Early Times to 1910: A New History* (eds. Duminy and Guest; Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter and Shooter, 1989).

132 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 41, referring to Gaitsgill, "Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women's Christianity in South Africa," in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa until 1945* (ed. Walker; Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 254.

133 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 41.

134 As I will indicate below, Muller neglects to identify another narrative, the visionary narrative of the call of God that Isaiah Shembe tells about himself, which is then reiterated in the oral tradition of his community.

135 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, xix.

136 Cabrita, "Isaiah Shembe's Theological Nationalism," 624.

Bible from missionary-*khulwa* Christianity, Shembe used it to harness, argues Muller, “the mythical power of virgin girls to win his battles against the racist state”.¹³⁷ One of the ways in which Shembe instituted and annexed the power of the female body was through the ritual appropriation of particular biblical narratives, such as the story of Jephthah’s daughter in Judges 11,¹³⁸ which we will come to later. Another was through ‘the law’ given by the Moses-like Shembe.

As Gunner notes, “the voice” that one encounters in reading those sections in the notebooks on “the law” is quite different from the more narrative sections. “It is the speech of authority, of a leader and law-maker. It shows Shembe setting out marriage regulations for his church and for those who lived on church land”. Shembe’s pronouncement, continues Gunner, “on marriage, divorce, on adultery and remarriage shows a path that is neither true to [African] customary law nor to Roman Dutch Law. Rather, Shembe looked to Biblical precedents and statements”.¹³⁹

Shembe was particularly attentive to the authoritative ‘voice’ or rhetoric of the Bible. That Shembe was familiar with the Bible is plainly apparent to anyone who listens to or reads his hymns and teachings. Esther Roberts records that though Shembe had “little mission education”, he was reported “to have been able to cite biblical references by chapter and verse, outwitting most European missionaries”.¹⁴⁰ What makes such claims more remarkable is that there is no clarity on whether or to what extent Shembe was literate. Carol Muller claims that, “Though illiterate in his early life, he learned to read and write in order to both read the Bible and write down his visions”.¹⁴¹ Bengt Sundkler makes a similar claim, but restricts his comments to Shembe’s writing, stating that Shembe taught himself to write in order to record the hymns that were given to him, often in dreams.¹⁴² Another version is given by his son Johannes Galilee, who is recorded as saying that, “When Shembe was working in town, he

137 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, xix.

138 West, “The Bible and the Female Body in Ibandla lamaNazareth: Isaiah Shembe and Jephthah’s Daughter,” *Old Testament Essays* 20, no. 2 (2007).

139 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 35.

140 Roberts, “Shembe: The Man and His Work” (Master of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, 1936), cited in Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 48.

141 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 48; but see Muller, “Making the Book, Performing the Words of Izihlabelelo ZamaNazareth,” in *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (ed. Draper; Atlanta, Pietermaritzburg and Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature, Cluster Publications and E.J. Brill, 2003), 96.

142 Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 187; see also Gunner, “The Word, the Book and the Zulu Church of Nazareth,” in *Oral Tradition*

learned to read and to write". Though he "did not enjoy any school education during his childhood", says J.G. Shembe, "in city migrant work, one man used to teach the other the art of reading and writing", so that Shembe was "able to read the Bible by himself".¹⁴³ Drawing on Shembe's own characterisation of his literacy, Elizabeth Gunner provides yet another account, quoting Shembe as he speaks before the Native Economic Commission in Pietermaritzburg in April 1931: "No, I have not been taught to read and write, but I am able to read the Bible a bit, and that came to me by revelation and not by learning. It came to me by miracle".¹⁴⁴

Shembe's own characterisation of his education and reading ability and what is remembered by his son may indicate that Isaiah Shembe had what Sam Tshehla calls "Bible literacy". This form of literacy is characterised by functionally non-literate people who "spell-read" the Bible. "They combine their knowledge of biblical tradition, collected over the years from sermons and/or public readings of the Bible, with patient identification of each letter and syllable until each word, phrase, or sentence rings familiar".¹⁴⁵ Suggesting that this type of literacy may characterise Shembe's literacy, Tshehla goes on to say, "Many elderly oral-aural readers of the Bible from my context who possess this ability cannot tell precisely when it began. These nonliterate believers then read the Bible without whatever else attends the acquisition of literacy; that is, they read the Bible orally".¹⁴⁶

As both Jonathan Draper and Gunner note, Shembe's 'literary credentials' do not come from the missionary schools of his time, "so that his biblical literacy remains rooted within the discourse patterns of Zulu oral culture".¹⁴⁷ In a

and Literacy: Changing Visions of the World (eds. Whitaker and Sienaert; Durban: Natal University Oral Documentation and Research Centre, 1986), 182.

143 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 33. Some of the oral re-membering of Shembe's early life locates Shembe in Johannesburg, where he worked in 'municipal' offices (where he may have learned to read and write) for a brief period after he left the Free State province before he returned to KwaZulu-Natal; personal communication, Rev F.I. Mgidi, 29 July 2015.

144 Gunner, "The Word, the Book and the Zulu Church of Nazareth," 187.

145 Tshehla, "Translation and the Vernacular Bible in the Debate between My 'Traditional' and Academic Worldviews," in *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (ed. Draper; Atlanta, Pietermaritzburg and Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature, Cluster Publications and E.J. Brill, 2003), 184.

146 Tshehla, "Translation and the Vernacular Bible in the Debate between My 'Traditional' and Academic Worldviews," 184.

147 Draper, "'Less Literate Are Safer': The Politics of Orality and Literacy in Biblical Interpretation," *Anglican Theological Review* LXXXIV, no. 2 (2002): 311; see also Brown,

deliberate allusion to Matthew 11:25 and perhaps 1 Corinthians 3:18–19, Shembe says of himself, “If you had educated him in your schools you would have taken pride in him. But that God may demonstrate his wisdom, he sent Shembe, a child, so that he may speak like the wise and the educated”.¹⁴⁸ Not only was it necessary to ‘take’ the Bible from the missionary-colonial system, it was also necessary to re-read it and re-write it with forms of reading and writing given directly to African peoples by God, unmediated by the missionary-colonial system. Restoring community to those damaged by the missionary-colonial system drew on the resources they—“the beautiful ones of God”—brought with them, including the reading and writing skills some of them had been taught in missionary schools, with Shembe encouraging them to use these skills to record in their own notebooks what was given (more) directly by God through Shembe the prophet—“the man of heaven”.¹⁴⁹

The Bible was available to Shembe in two of his vernaculars, SeSotho and isiZulu. Gunner has established that Shembe was fluent in isiZulu, SeSotho and Afrikaans. As Eric Hermanson, a translation consultant with the Bible Society of South Africa, has confirmed, the Paris Evangelical missionaries produced a translation of the Bible in SeSotho in 1881, though it was only distributed in 1883 due to the Basotho War.¹⁵⁰ It was revised and published again in 1909.¹⁵¹ The first isiZulu translation of the complete Bible was done by the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (American Zulu Mission), and was published in 1883.¹⁵² It was revised in 1893, and a facsimile of that edition is still published today. It is this ‘old’ isiZulu translation which is favoured by the AmaNazaretha.¹⁵³ “The fact that this was the only complete isiZulu Bible available (until 1924, when there was a new translation also by the missionaries of the AZM—which was never really accepted—and a rival translation by the Hermannsburg Mission) and the fact that the AmaNazaretha still

Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119–163.

148 Gunner, “The Word, the Book and the Zulu Church of Nazareth,” 182; Draper and West, “Anglicans and Scripture in South Africa,” in *Bounty in Bondage: The Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Essays in Honour of Edward King, Dean of Cape Town* (eds. England and Paterson; Johannesburg: Ravan, 1989), 311.

149 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 41.

150 Hermanson, “A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa,” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 2(2002): 14.

151 Hermanson, “A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa,” 14.

152 Hermanson, “A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa,” 15.

153 Hermanson, “A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa,” 15, and personal communication.

use it as their Bible of choice, suggests to me that this is the Bible their founder used".¹⁵⁴ An Afrikaans translation was not available until 1933,¹⁵⁵ so this version would have had little or no influence on Shembe's 'readings' of the Bible.

Shembe would have heard these Bible's read, preached and sung, and he surely had some capacity to (spell-)read them as well. Clearly the Bible was a significant text for Isaiah Shembe. My own analysis of the bulk of Isaiah Shembe's didactic discourses (as found, for example, in "Histories and Laws")¹⁵⁶ corroborates both Carol Muller's and Elizabeth Gunner's contention that the Bible is one of Shembe's primary inter-texts.¹⁵⁷ However, Muller's characterisation of Shembe's biblical hermeneutics is not borne out by my analysis. She states repeatedly that Shembe used a 'literal' reading of the Bible.¹⁵⁸ Not only is the term 'literal' imprecise and contested by biblical scholars,¹⁵⁹ but Shembe's actual biblical hermeneutics confounds even commonsense notions of this term. A more accurate characterisation of Shembe's biblical hermeneutics is hinted at in another formulation of Muller's, in which she says of Shembe that he "manipulated the written and holy word of the mission Bible".¹⁶⁰ True, Shembe does seize and reconstitute the Bible, but it also takes hold of him, drawing him and his female followers into its narratives.

In stealing the Bible from the victorious nation Shembe not only appropriates it for the conquered nation, he also effectively separates the Bible from 'the Pope's' dominant form of Christianity, allowing for a whole host of appropriations not activated or anticipated by missionary-colonial Christianity. And because Shembe is reconstructing community he is drawn to those biblical narratives, characters, and 'voices' that stand before him as the ancestors of the community he is struggling to restore. In the didactic portions of Shembe's teachings, faithfully recorded by literate members of his church in their family notebooks,¹⁶¹ we encounter "the speech of authority, of a leader and law-maker".¹⁶² It is the voice of a leader who stands (rhetorically) in the traditions

154 Hermanson, personal communication, 2004; see also Hermanson, "A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa."

155 Hermanson, "A Brief Overview of Bible Translation in South Africa," 16.

156 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 55–137.

157 West, "Reading Shembe 'Re-Membering' the Bible."

158 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, xix, 25, 48.

159 Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

160 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 21.

161 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 41.

162 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 35.

of Moses and Paul in particular, but also in the tradition of Jesus.¹⁶³ In these teachings Shembe adopts the rhetoric of Moses the law-giver addressing the people of 'Israel' (in the Pentateuch) and of Paul the apostle addressing his churches (in the Epistles). He even situates himself as Jesus speaking to his disciples, delivering his very own Sermon on the Mount.¹⁶⁴ What Shembe shares with these (and other) biblical ancestors is not only 'the word', but also visionary experiences and hearing directly the voice of God. Moses (Exodus 3:4), Paul (Acts 9:4), and Jesus (Mark 1:11), like Shembe,¹⁶⁵ are each called directly by God to take up their particular ministry. The focus in this chapter, however, is the 'word of God', a version of the 'voice of God', for in many ways the life of Isaiah Shembe, as it is re-membered in oral tradition,¹⁶⁶ parallels the life and ministry of Jesus in particular (—'re-placing' Jesus) and the lives of other biblical ancestors more generally.

Among the many biblical texts that are 'cited' and alluded to in "Histories and Laws", a compilation of Isaiah Shembe's teachings collected and translated by various scholars from the notebooks of particular families within Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the most frequently referred to Old Testament text is Deuteronomy and the most frequently referred to New Testament texts are the Epistles, with the Pauline (including the Deutero-Pauline Pastoral epistles) being by far the most frequent. Clearly the direct didactic form of address that

163 That Jesus is not as prominent in Shembe's form of 'Christianity' has led some to worry that his 'church' is not 'really' Christian. But, as I have argued, what constitutes 'Christian' is yet to be determined by African interlocutors. The Ebuhleni 'branch', called the Nazareth Baptist Church, of those 'churches' that claim allegiance to Isaiah Shembe, has indicated that they should be considered a 'religion' rather than a 'church'; personal communication, Rev F.I. Mgidi, 29 July 2015.

164 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 99. I also use the term 'rhetorical' to assure my biblical studies colleagues that I am not making a historical claim here concerning the authors of the biblical texts Shembe alludes to and 'cites'. Shembe, I am sure, was not particularly interested in the historical debates of his time (on other continents), if indeed he was ever aware of them at all, concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch and/or Pauline Epistles. He locates himself within the rhetoric of these biblical texts. As Lamin Sanneh notes, "[t]he reception of the Bible in the vernacular . . . side-stepped the controversies that accompanied the circulation of the Bible in early modern [and modern] Europe"; Sanneh, "Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse," 83.

165 Vilakazi, et al., *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society*, 24–26; Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 24–25. I am grateful to Mthokozisi Myeza for confirming this connection; personal communication, 29 July 2015.

166 See the 'stories' in Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, see also Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 41.

these texts adopt, often incorporating a first person subject, lend themselves to Shembe as he instructs his followers and constructs his congregation.

The phrase 'referred to' above is more accurate than 'cites', including as it does allusions, which is why I have placed the latter in inverted commas. Biblical texts are explicitly cited in "Histories and Laws", but in most cases the biblical text is not actually quoted. In fact, there are very few actual quotations, and when Bible texts are quoted it is only a few words of the verses cited. In the extracts from the notebook Gunner has translated, my preferred source text, cited biblical texts provide a broad orientation to the biblical location rather than a specific proof-text. This is particularly the case in Shembe's instructions on marriage and adultery, which provide an instructive and substantive case-study not only of Shembe's biblical hermeneutics but also of Shembe's didactic concerns.

The task of a biblical hermeneutical analysis is made feasible by the significant body of primary literature that is available.¹⁶⁷ In particular, the analysis of "Histories and Laws" that follows is based on the overlapping material found in Irving Hexham's "Some Prayers and Writings of the Servant of Sorrows: Isaiah Shembe",¹⁶⁸ Gunner's "Histories and Laws",¹⁶⁹ and Papini and Hexham's "Petros Dhlomo's Mngcwabo—The Nazarite Catechism".¹⁷⁰ In all of these writings, and the many others produced by the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the Bible is present. As Gunner points out, the "epistemological frame" for much of Shembe's ministry is biblical.¹⁷¹ Fortunately, for those of us who would analyse and engage with Shembe's world and work, "Writing, and the act of recording through written word, have . . . been a key part of the church's making of itself".¹⁷² "The tradition of copying, writing, recording and circulating is an established one among AmaNazaretha members"; indeed, as Gunner goes on to say, "Writing down, recording, diarising the holy, was a passion of early church members".¹⁷³

167 West, "Reading Shembe 'Re-Membering' the Bible," 158–159.

168 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha of Ekuphakameni: Selected Writings of the Zulu Prophets Isaiah and Londa Shembe* (trans. Shembe and Becken; Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1994), 1–104.

169 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 55–137.

170 Papini and Hexham eds, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 1–112.

171 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 7.

172 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 15.

173 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 16.

Significantly, “The emphasis in the church on the written word does not mean that this remains accessible only for a small group of elite within the church”;¹⁷⁴ handwritten notebooks, such as those lent to Gunner by the late Bishop Londa Shembe in January 1987 and which comprise her book,¹⁷⁵ “often circulate privately among members of a particular family or congregation; they are usually notes of sermons or accounts of visions and dreams, their own, or those of other members, which have been listened to first hand or heard from others”.¹⁷⁶ Cohabiting alongside the oral/aural, the “great body of writing from Ibandla lamaNazaretha testifies to the value given to the written word by ordinary people”.¹⁷⁷ And even more significantly for my book, we move in this chapter from the missionary record to the African record. Africans now write for themselves.

174 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 16.

175 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, xii. This may well be the same notebook that Londa Shembe sent to Irving Hexham. Londauskosi Insikayakho Shembe (known as Londa Shembe) sent Hexham his English translation of his grandfather's (Isaiah Shembe) writings, asking him to “prepare the manuscript for publication by making any minor changes . . . necessary to correct his grammar, standardize his use of capital letters, and add additional headings to present the material in a more readable form”; see Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, xix–xx. The corrected and completed manuscript was then returned to Londa Shembe for his approval, who gave it his unconditional approbation. Hexham is at pains to point out that English translations of Londa Shembe “give an authoritative and *divinely inspired rendition* of the original Zulu which was, according to the beliefs of the church, only possible because of his prophetic office” (xxi). So, while Hexham acknowledges that it is a translation, he maintains that it is also “far more: it is a *revelation*” (xxi–xxii). I heed Hexham's argument, but as a biblical scholar I am more wary of translations than he is, and so I would have preferred to have the originals from which Londa Shembe worked. Fortunately, Gunner provides us with both a careful English translation and the isiZulu originals of what may well be the very same notebook. One of the three notebooks lent to Gunner by Londa Shembe in January 1987 seems to be substantially the same text from which Gunner extracts “Histories and Laws”; see Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, xii, and 52, note 10. There are however intriguing differences, which may be explained by each collection being only a selection from the 220 page notebook; see Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 35. But it may be that Hexham and Gunner worked with similar but different notebooks; Robert Papini attempts to analyse the compositional and redactional history of the writings of Ibandla lamaNazaretha, suggesting that some of the notebooks may well have been copied from a central book or set of books; see Papini, “Introduction,” xix–xx.

176 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 16.

177 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 16.

The Re-written Bible: Shembe's Teaching

As Gunner acknowledges, the varieties of discourse present in "Histories and Laws" are "constantly shot through with Biblical references which sustain and exemplify the experiences, arguments and exemplifications around which these discourses are set".¹⁷⁸ "Since Biblical texts are 'read' by those who themselves may not be literate", says Gunner citing some of my work,¹⁷⁹

the very language of the Bible, and the knowledge of it—from the legalistic texts of Deuteronomy to the organisational practicalities of a New Testament book such as Paul's Letter to the Galatians—is itself a resource, a source of resistance and of what Gerald West calls 're-mem-bering'. Both the texts referred to here show Shembe's deep knowledge of the Bible, and it is particularly in 'Histories/*Imilando*' that the 'voice' and the Biblical knowledge of Shembe most reveals itself.¹⁸⁰

So it is to the "Histories and Laws" and their parallel collections that we now turn, trying to understand how Shembe 're-members' the Bible, having stolen it from those who stole the cattle from African peoples. The 'Word of God' is remembered as oral/aural teaching by Shembe, whose community re-members it again as written text.

Instructions on marriage and adultery occur with regularity in "Histories and Laws".¹⁸¹ In the teaching "Pertaining to Laws"¹⁸² Shembe states: "This is my pronouncement concerning marriage as it affects both married men and women".¹⁸³ He begins immediately by stating the responsibilities of the man, namely, that "A man must not desert his wife and only death may separate them".¹⁸⁴ Shembe is alluding here to Roman 7:1–3, picking up on part of Paul's

¹⁷⁸ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 8–9.

¹⁷⁹ West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); see West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 63–87.

¹⁸⁰ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Gunner has served us well by placing the isiZulu version on one page and her English translation on the facing page; in my analysis I refer to both.

¹⁸² Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65–67. This is "Concerning the Laws" (item 3) in Hexham Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazareth*, 11–12; and "Laws of Shembe (Concerning Marriage)" (item 7.6) in Papini and Hexham Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 106–107.

¹⁸³ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

¹⁸⁴ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

argument concerning the temporal scope of the law and his example of how the law of marriage is binding on a woman until, but not beyond, the death of her husband. However, as we will see in more detail below in the next teaching, “The Law”, where he again alludes to Romans 7, here in “Pertaining to Laws” Shembe immediately goes on to use this biblical allusion for his own purposes (and not Paul’s), stating that, “A married woman must not leave her husband when he is in good health and even if he comes on hard times she must try to alleviate his troubles”.¹⁸⁵ However, he then qualifies his instructions to the married woman by saying that, “If [*uma*]¹⁸⁶ it becomes unbearable, she may part from the man by acting as follows: she should take the matter to the elders for them to discuss. If the decision goes against the man then the woman may leave him”.¹⁸⁷ Then follow “the conditions of her going”.¹⁸⁸ These include that neither the woman nor the man should marry again while the other is alive:

These are the conditions of her going: we do not agree in any way that she should marry while her husband is still alive. She should go to the place of forgiveness where the widows live, those who have foregone marriage and chosen celibacy in the name of the Lord. Neither should the man who has left her, marry. He too should remain unmarried as long as his wife lives and maintain her all her life.¹⁸⁹

The tone throughout is reminiscent of the apostle Paul, except that Paul uses both the singular ‘I’ and the plural ‘we’, whereas Shembe uses ‘we’ exclusively. The communal dimension of the instruction is evident in both Shembe and Paul. What is unique to Shembe is the designation and identification of a specific space for the woman who has left; it is a “place of forgiveness”, and it is a place of celibacy. Both have strong religious resonances. Celibacy “in the name of the Lord” appears to be a worthy choice for a woman, and there is almost certainly an allusion to 1 Corinthians 7, a biblical text Shembe explicitly cites in another of his instructions (see below). In his letter to the Corinthian church Paul engages with marriage and sex at some length. The following extract (verses 7–12) demonstrate both that and how Shembe re-members this Pauline text:

185 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

186 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 64.

187 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

188 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

189 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am [that is, celibate]. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if . . . (NAS).

As we will see below, this a key biblical text in Shembe's instructions, with Paul and Shembe sharing similar concerns. However, while Shembe has a particular sequestered site in mind for the woman who leaves, there is no such allocated space for the man.

The concern for the family is evident in the next element of the instruction, where Shembe deals with the children. "As for the children, the man must let them go with the wife to her household if they so wish and he should maintain them with their mother until her death, when they may return to the father, should they so desire".¹⁹⁰ Paul never instructs about the material care of children; all his references to children are either to children in a metaphorical spiritual sense or to the instruction of children in the faith.

Shembe then turns his attention specifically to adultery, devoting considerable space to his instructions:

If the man leaves his wife because he is caught red-handed in adultery with two or three witnesses, the elders can release the man and allow him to take another wife if he has subsequently separated from his wife for that reason. And a woman may leave an adulterous husband, and may marry again. If the man is married, then she must not live in that house. [The sense of this sentence in Zulu is not entirely clear.] If a man commits adultery, he must depart and leave his wife in the house.¹⁹¹

The reference to "two or three witnesses" is another biblical allusion, this time to a number of Shembe's favourite texts, Deuteronomy (17:6, 19:15), Matthew's gospel (18:16), 1 Timothy (5:19), as well as to another Pauline text, 2 Corinthians 13:1. There is also a reference to "two or three witnesses" in Hebrews 10:28

¹⁹⁰ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

¹⁹¹ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65. The square bracket is Gunner's.

(which ‘sounds’ similar in some respects to a Pauline epistle). Though none of these texts deals explicitly with adultery, they are all (except the Hebrews text) designed to protect the accused person from a false accusation. Though the demand for “two or three witnesses” may seem to protect the man, so far in Shembe’s teaching there is no ‘blame’ whatsoever on the woman.

Shembe’s pronouncement continues, turning now to how re-marriage affects inheritance. In discussing the question of inheritance in such circumstances Shembe says,

The inheritance in such cases will go to the first-born son but he will use it as his mother wills. If this woman re-marries, the second man need not pay *lobolo* as the woman has access to her son’s inheritance from his father. If the man has been adulterous and the couple have separated and there is no child, the inheritance will go to the wife; the man should leave with only his clothes (Deuteronomy 22 v 22).¹⁹²

Recognising, perhaps, that what he is here saying goes against the patriarchal grain of both the Bible and the dominant traditions of African culture, Shembe continues immediately to ask: “You are surprised that if a man loses a case of adultery and he and his wife are childless, that he is to leave with nothing but his clothes, and the inheritance is the wife’s even if she marries again? Even if the man has a farm, he takes nothing”.¹⁹³ Shembe’s position here is unusual, declaring as he does the man to be the one most likely to commit adultery and adopting a theological position that would be at odds with the patriarchal ideological orientation of these particular biblical texts, as well as the patriarchal ideological orientation of missionary-*kholwa* Christianity and local African culture. Shembe thus far in this instruction says nothing about the woman committing adultery. But he does turn to the agency of the woman in the very next sentence, saying: “You are surprised that if a wife commits adultery and she has children she should leave them with her husband and only go with the child at her breast? And when the child is fully grown, he should go back to his father, and go only with his clothes and eating dish, leaving everything else behind, but the father should maintain the child until it is old enough to return to him.”¹⁹⁴

Shembe’s citation of Deuteronomy 22:22 allows us to analyse how he uses the Bible more closely (in this instance and more generally) and to note how

192 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

193 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

194 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65.

willing and able he is to use its authority while modifying its import. First, Deuteronomy 22:22 says the following: “If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel” (NAS). Clearly, Shembe is not quoting this text. As with many other biblical texts, Shembe is alluding to the general textual context of the text, in this case a text dealing with instructions/laws on marriage (beginning at 22:13 and ending at 22:30 or perhaps 23:2). Second, however, while the general thrust of the Deuteronomy pericope lays the blame for divorce and adultery at the door of the woman, Shembe shifts the emphasis to the man. In fact, whereas “Pertaining to Laws” begins with the woman experiencing problems with the man, and so seeking a divorce, Deuteronomy is exactly the opposite, beginning with the man finding fault with the woman he has married (22:13). What Shembe retains from this text is the rhetorical mode of instruction, the general topic (marriage, divorce, adultery) and the communal context in which these matters are to be decided. What Shembe re-members is a focus on the man as the person primarily responsible for adultery. Throughout these teachings there seems to be a concern for providing protection and provision for women.

Shembe’s instructions in this extract, “Pertaining to Laws”, continues with the issue of a man marrying a second wife, in a new section with the sub-heading “Advice about marrying for believers”.¹⁹⁵ The way in which Shembe begins this instruction is significant, echoing as it does the hortatory tone of the (in particular, Pauline) Epistles: “This is the law I set out for believers who wish to marry. If a man asks his wife permission to take a second wife and she agrees, she should go to the elders of the church and say, ‘I wish my husband to take another wife’”.¹⁹⁶ Again, Shembe embodies the rhetoric of Paul in establishing the law on marriage. That the starting point is the taking of a second wife perhaps links this teaching with the teaching on adultery; perhaps Shembe is implying that given the man’s propensity towards adultery, he is less likely to commit adultery if he takes a second wife.

195 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 12–13. In Hexham’s text this item is given its own heading, “Advice to those who marry in the faith” (12), but is otherwise similar, except that the biblical reference given in Gunner’s version of the text in the discussion about the *lobolo* cattle (66–67), which is to Genesis 21:8–11, is not included in Hexham’s version (13). The earlier reference to Genesis 16:4–6 in the context of the mistreatment of the married woman is in both versions.

196 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 65–67.

Shembe accords the woman substantial agency in the process. She should be asked, she should be given the opportunity to agree, and if she does so, it is she who should go to the elders, saying that it is her wish that her husband take a second wife. If such is the case, Shembe continues, “The church is not in a position to refuse if it happens in this way”.¹⁹⁷

But, should the wife not agree, the process continues, Shembe goes on to explain. “But if the wife does not agree to her husband’s marrying again, the man must go to the elders himself three times”. Immediately, Shembe goes on to delineate the extended process:

He must separate out the times when he approaches them as follows: he may go back to the elders after six months. He should have proof that, “Yes, I have spoken to my wife three times, begging her to agree to my taking another wife. I do not find fault with her over anything, I simply wish to take another wife”.

The elders will reply, “What evidence have you that there were people who heard you when you asked your wife on three occasions and she refused?” If he replies, “I have evidence”, the elders should call both the witnesses and the wife. If the witnesses agree that the wife did indeed refuse three times, the elders are obliged to wait and ask the wife whether the husband treated her just as well after the three people had given witness, as he had before? If the wife replies, “Yes”. They should say, “Does he still treat you well today?”

If she replies, “Yes he does”, the elders say, “Well why should he start mistreating you today then? Surely it’s not as if you are saying, “My husband wants to remarry and is ill-treating me?” If that were the case we should refuse permission because when he was married a second time he really would treat you badly, seeing that he is already doing so” (Genesis 16 v 4–6).

A man may marry [*Indoda ingaganwa*]¹⁹⁸ but he must not take the *lobolo* cattle from the beasts already at the homestead (Genesis 21 v 8–11). He must take cattle that have been farmed out and are elsewhere. Once the bride price [*Ekumloboleni kwayo lo mfazi*]¹⁹⁹ has been paid he should not

197 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 67.

198 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 66.

199 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 66.

take the [new] wife into the homestead, but build her home somewhere else.²⁰⁰

If the ideal of agreement is not possible, Shembe requires a protracted period of time and a range of congregational consultations. In the end, provided there is no evidence of mistreatment, the man may take a second wife. But the first wife is to be protected economically and spatially. Some concern for her dignity is built into the protracted process, even though in the end the (caring and patient) man can have his way. The man, it is assumed, does not need to explain why he wants a second wife, though perhaps the larger literary-legal set of teachings on adultery (in Gunner's version) provides the frame.

It is worth pausing here to note that cattle still play a role in Shembe's restored community. Though they have been conquered and though their cattle have been taken, the restored community still requires cattle to constitute community, though the role of cattle is greatly diminished.

The focus of this chapter is on how the Bible is used, and this sub-section provides two direct and a number of indirect biblical engagements. As in the first part of "Pertaining to Laws", the role of witnesses is important to Shembe's legal processes. There is also probably an allusion to Jesus's teachings on forgiveness in Matthew 18:15–17, where Jesus outlines a process, similar to the kind of process Shembe envisages. What Shembe takes from this text is not its content but its didactic shape:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (NAS).

There are also specific citations in this sub-section of "Pertaining to Laws". The first, Genesis 16:4–6, refers Shembe's listeners to the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar:

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in

200 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 67. The latter square bracket is Gunner's.

to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. *He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me."* But Abram said to Sarai, *"Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight."* So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence. Now the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. . . . (16:1–7 NAS).

The citation probably refers to this scene in the narrative as a whole. The cited verses (verses 4–6, which I have placed in italics) are referenced by Shembe because they deal with 'ill-treatment'. However, in this case the ill-treatment comes from the first wife, Sarai, not from the husband, Abraham. What the biblical text provides for Shembe is not a one-to-one correlation with his context, but a thematic reservoir that shares significant resemblances with his context.

The final verse, verse 7, immediately after the italics, may also be an element of the biblical text that Shembe is drawing on. When Hagar flees the ill-treatment of her mistress, Sarai, she flees to a place of refuge, where "the angel of the Lord" finds her. It may be this place of refuge for Hagar that resonates with (or perhaps even prompts Shembe to establish) "the place of forgiveness" that Shembe designates for the woman who leaves her husband.

The other biblical citation, also from Genesis, also representing the rhetoric and teaching of Moses, is to Genesis 21:8–11, and returns to the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar:

The child [Isaac] grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. Now Sarah saw the son [Ishmael] of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son (NAS).

The citation is precise, and the connections here with Shembe's instruction are clear. Shembe instructs the man who marries a second wife to ensure that the kind of tension that develops between Ishmael and Isaac does not happen

in their Nazarite community.²⁰¹ Shembe proves wiser than Abraham, learning from him and instructing the man who takes a second wife to establish separate economic and familial space for each wife's household.

The instruction "Pertaining to Laws" is followed in this notebook by "The Prayer for Dingana's Day December 16",²⁰² which is then followed by the most detailed discussion of adultery in "Histories and Laws".²⁰³ "The Law" is entirely about adultery and begins unambiguously with a focus on the male: "I have placed the weight of the law on adultery on the man's shoulders, as it is he who ought to use most control in that matter because woman is but a child in bodily strength compared to a man".²⁰⁴ After this introductory instructional statement, the remainder of the instruction provides a detailed elaboration and application, in a style strongly reminiscent of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus).

However, nowhere in "The Law" is there any overt citation of these biblical texts, though other biblical texts are explicitly cited. In Shembe's 're-membling' of the Bible, biblical texts are often alluded to without being actually cited. In this case, "The Law" is heavily dependent on 1 Timothy in particular. That Shembe knew the Pastoral Epistles well is clear from the many citations of these texts in "Histories and Laws" more generally.

Having declared his emphasis on "the man", Shembe now turns to the woman (and the allusion to Genesis 3 is deliberate in both my formulation and in Shembe's):

But in the case of woman, woman was created from man therefore a woman lacks the strength to hold herself back if she is assailed by a man's weakness because she herself is formed from man. If a man lures her through the tricks of love she will succumb quickly because man is the father of woman. When woman was created man suckled her, she grew, she was nurtured through the expertise of the man (Genesis 2 v 21).²⁰⁵

201 For an analysis of how Shembe's community understands itself as a 'Nazarite' community, often formally referred to as 'the Nazarite Baptist Church', see Chakravarty, *African Nazarites: Rastafari and Ibandla lamaNazareth* (Leiden: Brill, Forthcoming).

202 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 69.

203 The items and their ordering up to this point are the same for both Hexham and Gunner. This item is "A law [Concerning Adultery]" (item 6) in Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazareth*, 15–16. And it is "Shembe's Commandments (Concerning Adultery)" (item 7.5) Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 104–105.

204 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

205 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

This paragraph—and I am following the paragraphs as presented by Gunner who follows the paragraph layout of the original notebook²⁰⁶—points to two recurring elements of Shembe's perspective on these matters. First, unlike so much patriarchal literature, including much of the Bible and African oral tradition *on adultery*, the woman is passive and is “assailed by a man's weakness” (*ehlelwa ubuthakathaka bendoda*).²⁰⁷ She is acted upon, and “lacks the strength to hold herself back” (*akamandla ukuzimbamba*),²⁰⁸ but only “if” [or “when”, *uma*] the man succumbs to his (and, in Shembe's opinion, the principal) weakness.

It is the next sentence, however, which situates Shembe's instruction in its biblical frame. The conditional clause, “because man is the father of woman” (*ngokuba indoda inguyise womfazi*),²⁰⁹ alludes to 1 Timothy, even though the citation that follows the next sentence refers to Genesis. This is not that strange when we recognise that 1 Timothy 2:13–15, which Shembe's text echoes, is itself an interpretation of the Genesis text to which Shembe explicitly refers. Shembe cites the primary text, not the secondary text (1 Timothy), though both are present in his argument.

Indeed, it is the argumentative form itself that Shembe borrows from 1 Timothy 2:12–15, though the terms of the argument are recast. Like the ‘Paul’ of 1 Timothy, Shembe begins his argument by establishing a hierarchy, both in terms of time and substance, with the latter having the priority in Shembe's argument, while the former takes precedence in Pauls' argument:

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint (1 Timothy 2:12–15, NAS).

As with so many other biblical texts, Shembe draws on elements of this text, recasting them for his own purposes. In this case, he retains the interest in the male-female relationship, the first person form of address, and the argumentative style. He shifts the focus, however, from issues of female and male roles in worship to issues of marriage and adultery. What allows Shembe to make this

206 In the previous instruction, “Pertaining to Laws”, the logic of each paragraph as a paragraph is not that apparent.

207 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70/71.

208 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70/71.

209 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70/71.

shift is the dependency of 1 Timothy 2:13–15 on Genesis 2:21–25, which is about sex and marriage:

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed (NAS).

Returning to Shembe’s ‘re-membered’ text, we can see that he re-reads 1 Timothy’s interpretation of the Genesis text, demonstrating that Paul’s reading of Genesis 2 is not self-evident but deeply ideologically determined. As we have seen, Shembe emphasises that “woman was created from man” rather than that “Adam was formed first”. Shembe, like the Genesis text, wants to foreground the connections between the man and the woman, rather than the oppositions between the man and the woman, which is the emphasis of the 1 Timothy text. Both, however, retain the man-woman hierarchy.

Shembe is also alluding here to Genesis 3, which is, after all, part of the larger literary unit that has its beginning in Genesis 2. In approaching the man and the woman in the garden, after they have disobeyed God, God addresses the man first (3:9), and only then turns to the woman (3:13). Shembe follows this ordering, addressing the man first and then the woman. In Genesis 3:12 the man blames the woman (and God for giving him this woman) for causing him to disobey, and it is this blaming of the woman that ‘Paul’ picks up on. Shembe resists blaming the woman, even though Genesis 3 and 1 Timothy 2 offer this interpretive opportunity.

The hierarchy 1 Timothy finds in Genesis 2 has to do with the woman being the secondary not the primary human. The hierarchy Shembe reads in Genesis 2 and 3 has to do with the male’s nurturing role. The man is “the father of woman”, who “suckled her”, causing her to grow; “she was nurtured through the expertise of the man (Genesis 2 v 21).”²¹⁰ It is not clear to me quite what Shembe is arguing here, using as he does images of the male as a mother-father, suckling the woman. The isiZulu sentence clearly deserves further reflection: “*Ekudatshulweni komfazi wancela endodeni, wakhula, wondliwa ngokwazi kwendoda*”.

²¹⁰ Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

Shembe continues with the man's nurturing role in the next paragraph, incrementally elaborating his argument:

Man has been twice responsible for woman, he has been both father and mother, and this is how it still is. If a man feels tempted by a certain woman, the woman will quickly be tempted too. The strength to stand fast in the face of that temptation is the man's. That is why I say that the law concerning adultery rests most heavily on the man. It is he who most needs to control himself. Adam was superior to his wife because from the beginning woman came from below man's head (Genesis 2 v 22).²¹¹

Man as the nurturer of woman is "both father and mother", an interpretation that is unique to Shembe (in that it is not overtly indicated in either of his source texts). Yet Shembe implies that this image is to be found in the Bible, using the formulation "he has been [in the Bible] . . . and this is how it still is [in contemporary communities]". Shembe perhaps finds the notion of the man as 'father' from 2:22, as cited, where we read: "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man" (NAS). And he perhaps finds the notion of the man as 'mother' from 2:23, where we read: "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; . . ." (NAS). The man as the "mother" who "suckled" the woman may perhaps become clearer as we explore Shembe's teachings on marriage and adultery further (see below), but for now Genesis 2:22–23 offers Shembe textual detail for this interpretation.

According to Shembe's interpretation, it is precisely the "strength" of the man that makes him both the usual perpetrator who "lures her through the tricks of love", the one who "feels tempted" first (followed by the woman who subsequently "will quickly be tempted too"), and the one who has the "strength to stand fast in the face of that temptation". It is the man's responsibility to resist his own impulses. There is no sign here of the woman as temptress, a figure implicit in 1 Timothy and explicit in the traditions of the Christian church's reading of 1 Timothy down through the centuries.²¹² In Shembe's teaching the man is tempter. "It is he who most needs to control himself".

The paragraph ends with an overt reference to Genesis 2:22, as Shembe cites the biblical text to support his teaching. The rhetorical frame remains that of

211 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

212 Bal, "Metaphors He Lives By," *Semeia* 61 (1993).

the 1 Timothy text, but Shembe now moves into an extended interpretation of the Genesis text, beginning here and continuing into the next paragraph:

Coming from the rib of man, woman is the flesh of man, if a man says to any woman, "Come flesh of my flesh return from whence you came", the woman will quickly be overcome. So the man must realise this: that very rib that was taken from Adam and formed into a woman was not the only rib, the Almighty caused it to increase and he gave Adam's stock rib upon rib, so it is not for any Adam to say to a rib that is not his, "Come flesh of my flesh, come to me", just because Eve was created from Adam when he was already full grown.²¹³

This is quite a complex argument and represents Shembe's commentary on Genesis 2:21–23. Shembe 're-members' this text in order to address the matter at hand, in this case adultery. The notion that "Adam was superior to his wife because from the beginning woman came from below man's head" almost certainly draws on another biblical text, Ephesians 5:21–33, a text which has the same instructional tone and structure as 1 Timothy, which deals with marriage, and which also explicitly cites Genesis 2:23 (in verse 31, in italics):

... and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. *For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh* [Genesis 2:24]. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband (NAS).

213 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

The resonances between this text and Shembe's are striking, but so too are the differences. Both Paul and Shembe position the woman below the man's head and both expect the man to exercise considerable responsibility for the well-being of the marriage, using the language of nurturing and nourishing. But whereas 'Paul', here and in 1 Timothy,²¹⁴ begins with the woman, Shembe begins with and remains focussed on the man.

In this paragraph Shembe seems to be arguing that the act of creation is repeated with each man, God having given "Adam's stock rib upon rib" (*uNkulunkulu sewalwandisa wabanika oAdam ubambo ngobamo*).²¹⁵ The implication of this, it would seem, is that each man must be content with his own rib and must not "say to a rib that is not his, 'Come flesh of my flesh, come to me'". My reading here of Shembe's argument is supported in the next paragraph.

Eve did not know for herself that she was formed from Adam. She was told, "You, woman, you were taken from Adam's flesh", she did not see the scar showing her origin. Eve was simply told, and even to this day it is so. If a man says, "Come, my flesh", the woman rushes fascinated to him as if created from that very man. I am speaking, indeed pleading with you men, a calf has very tender flesh (Genesis 18 v 17). A woman's body, her shape, her softness is very appealing to you men. Men love saying, "Come flesh of my flesh." I beg you, men, you really must control yourselves.²¹⁶

The woman, Shembe seems to be arguing, is not able to detect which man she is the rib of, unless she is explicitly told. So again, Shembe reiterates the woman's passivity and the man's agency. Given her inability to know to whom she belongs, she is susceptible to the man who beckons her "as if" she were his rib. The responsibility, he states again, is the man's. It is men who must control themselves. The woman's body, her shape, and her softness are not declared to be a problem. The problem is the man's inability to control his adulterous nature, calling to women who are not his rib.

The Genesis reference in this paragraph is illuminating, because it reveals other elements of Shembe's biblical hermeneutics. The verse cited says, "The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do . . .?', which seems a strange association. As I have already said, Shembe often uses chapter and verse citations to point to a larger textual unit. In this case the textual unit is the story of Abraham's generous hospitality to "three men" (Genesis 18:2),

214 Again, 'Paul' is the textual or rhetorical 'Paul'; I am not making historical claims concerning the Pauline authorship of either of these texts.

215 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70/71.

216 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

two of whom are later identified as angels (Genesis 19:1) and the other one as “the Lord” (Genesis 18:13) and God’s destruction of Sodom (and Gormorrah) (Genesis 18:1–19:29). As the three men approach the tents of Abraham and Sarah, we read that Abraham “ran to the herd, and took a tender and choice calf” and prepared it for his guests, so there may be a link here to the woman, who is like the calf (*ithole lenkomo*),²¹⁷ having tender flesh. If there is indeed an allusion to this part of the extended narrative then Shembe may be implying that the woman, like Abraham’s calf, should be considered as having been offered/sacrificed to God, and therefore Shembe’s men “must control yourselves”, recognising they are dealing with sacred “flesh”. As we will see later in the chapter, Shembe institutes a religious ritual within his community in which the young women of the community are offered/sacrificed to God.

With respect to the Sodom section of the extended narrative, Shembe may well be alluding to a number of issues here. First, Shembe may be styling himself as Abraham who negotiates with God for the righteous in Sodom (18:23–33). In this instruction on “The Law” it is Shembe who pleads with God on behalf of the men in his church, by begging (*Ngikhuluma kini ngokuncenga madoda; Ngiyanincenga zibambeni kulokho, madoda*) the men to control themselves. This brings us to a second possible allusion here. Shembe seems to see some correspondence between the men of Sodom who “called out to Lot, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them [ie. rape them]’” (19:5, NAS). Shembe correctly, in my view and that of many biblical scholars, attributes the destruction of Sodom to its failure to care for and offer hospitality to strangers.²¹⁸ The men in his church, he seems to be arguing, must guard against losing their self-control as the men of Sodom had lost their self-control, because the loss of self-control endangers the social fabric of the whole congregation and indeed the wider community. There may even be a third allusion in this section of the narrative. Angels, as we will see below, are attentive to what takes place between men and women, and so the intervention of the two angels when Lot offers his daughters to the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:8–11) may be a warning to men who lack self-control. A man attempting to take a woman that is not destined for him does so in the presence of angels.

Another element in Shembe’s ‘re-membering’ of the Bible worth noting is the absence of any engagement with the history of interpretation of this text (and similarly 1 Timothy). Both Genesis 18–19 and 1 Timothy 2:12–15 have

217 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70.

218 Moore, *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* (London: Continuum, 2003), 70–85.

borne a heavy burden of interpretation and done extensive damage.²¹⁹ Most of the history of interpretation of these texts either lays the blame on women (1 Timothy) or on homosexuals (Genesis 18–19). Shembe, as someone who was not substantially formed by missionaries or a related Settler Initiated Church, is unaware of much of this interpretive baggage and so interprets the Bible from his own indigenous intertexts. For Shembe it is not women or homosexuals who are the problem, but (heterosexual) men.

Shembe concludes this instruction on adultery with the following final paragraph, continuing the extended metaphor of each 'rib' having been 'given' to a particular man:

Keep hold of yourself so that if [God] has already given the rib to another of your spiritual brethren, don't trouble it by saying, "Come my flesh", don't cause that rib to sin before God (1 Corinthians 7 v 39). The law should be obeyed (Romans 7 v 4).²²⁰

Here it is explicit that particular women belong to (as he says earlier) or in theological language are "given" to particular men. The social fabric is sustained by God, Shembe argues, and men must abide by God's particular giving of a woman to a man. When men step out of God's order (as delineated here by Shembe), they threaten their "spiritual brethren". They also "trouble" (*-hlupha*)²²¹ the woman and "cause . . . [her] to sin before God". Clearly, it is not the woman who is the cause of either congregational/social strife or sin, but the man.

Again, Shembe uses biblical texts to support and sanction his admonition. And once again, it is instructive to analyse these carefully. As we have already established, the cited text is a pointer to its larger literary unit. In this case, Shembe alludes (again, see above) to Paul's extensive teaching on sexuality and marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1–40). Among the many connections that Shembe may have found between his context and this text are the following. First, the immediate literary context of the verse cited (1 Corinthians 7:39) deals with the issue of self-control, with Paul arguing, in verses 36–37: "But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin [daughter/betrothed],

219 Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 92–99; West, "Taming Texts of Terror: Reading (against) the Gender Grain of 1 Timothy," *Scriptura* 86 (2004).

220 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 71.

221 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 70.

if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin [daughter/betrothed], he will do well" (NAS). Shembe may be picking up on the importance of controlling sexual desire, as advocated by Paul. Though Shembe is not apposed to "those who have foregone marriage and chosen celibacy in the name of the Lord", as we have noted above, marriage is the preferred state. Paul, however, advocates celibacy as his preference (in the context in which the Corinthian church, and the church in the first century as a whole, finds itself).

Second, as I have indicated repeatedly, Shembe adopts the epistolary style of Paul, including the first person form of address and the regular use of the singular object ('man', not 'men'). Third, Shembe's use of biblical citations may be an indication of when he believes his instructions to be 'of the Lord'. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul establishes a distinction between those instructions that are directly from God ("To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that . . ." (1 Corinthians 7:10)), and those that have no direct divine mandate but which come from him ("To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that . . ." (1 Corinthians 7:12)). The absence of biblical citations may indicate, for Shembe, a slightly weaker authority claim.

The last scriptural reference, Romans 7:4, is similar in many respects to the 1 Corinthians citation. Again the actual verse referred to is not directly relevant to Shembe's statement, though the broader literary context is. At its broadest, Paul is dealing here with the relationship between the believer and the law, which is probably where Shembe gets the heading, "The Law", for this instruction from. However, while Paul's discussion in Romans engages with a host of theological complexities concerning the relationship between law and grace, Shembe seems to focus only on one of Paul's examples within his detailed and complex argument—the example of marriage and adultery (Romans 7:1–3). Paul uses marriage as an example of how the law affects people. The law, he argues, "is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime":

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man (NAS).

Paul, however, continues immediately in Romans 7:4—and here we come to Shembe's citation—having given this example, to say, “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God” (NAS). Romans 7:4 appears to have little directly to do with Shembe's instruction in “The Law”, but serves as a general pointer to a whole range of associations Shembe wants to make with respect to ‘the law’, some of which may not be apparent to those outside Ibandla lamaNazaretha.²²²

To those of us not steeped in the traditions of the Ibandla lamaNazaretha what is apparent is Shembe's close association of his teachings with those of Paul (and Moses). He adopts Paul's literary mannerisms, Paul's authority, Paul's position as leader of God's people. He also adopts some of Paul's theological perspectives, though he often adapts them, ‘re-membering’ them for his context.

The above two texts contain the most sustained instructions on marriage and adultery. But in a number of the other texts, adultery, like marriage, is a regular concern to Shembe. Before I analyse these, it is worth pointing out that the texts from Shembe's teaching that I have engaged with do not provide a chronological representation (and, therefore, development) of Shembe's thought or biblical hermeneutic. The dated items in the notebook make it clear that the items are not chronological. That they are not, raises the question concerning to what extent these texts might have undergone scribal and/or redactional editing. Comparisons of other notebooks would shed considerable light on this potentially important interpretive activity. Where more than one source for the same text is available such comparison would be possible and would provide some understanding of how Shembe's followers ‘re-membered’ his own words. As far as I know, little of this kind of detailed analysis has been done, though Robert Papini does provide us with an important preliminary redactional history of such texts,²²³ and Gunner does make a few suggestive comments on particular texts.²²⁴

222 For some reflection on emic/etic insider/outsider understandings of Shembe's teaching see West, “Layers of Reception of Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11) among the AmaNazaretha: From the Early 1900s to Today,” in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* (eds. Lyons and England; London: Bloomsburg T&T Clark, 2015). Part of my purpose in citing so much of the primary material is in order to enable others to offer their own engagements with this material, seeing what I am unable to see.

223 Papini, “Introduction.”

224 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 38–39, 46, 49. Those following my footnotes will recognise that they are an attempt to try and understand the relationship between the original manuscript/s that underlie/s Hexham's and Gunner's collections.

I return now to the other instructions on marriage and adultery. Though not dealing directly with adultery, in the teaching “Shembe’s Words of Wisdom”²²⁵ he does deal with the matter of a minister having more than one wife. His biblical hermeneutic moves here corroborate my earlier analysis. Using the language and logic of 1 Timothy, Shembe says, “I do not permit a minister [*umfundisi*]²²⁶ to have two wives”.²²⁷ The allusion here is definitely to 1 Timothy 3:2 (where ‘Paul’ instructs that a bishop or overseer must be the husband of one wife) and 1 Timothy 3:12 (where Paul says the same about deacons). But Paul does not use the language “I do not permit”, so where does Shembe derive this instructional form? This phrase is found in 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul says “I permit no woman [or wife] to teach or to have authority over a man [or her husband]”. Shembe, however, takes “*angivumeli*”/“I do not permit” from Paul’s female focussed use in 1 Timothy 2:12 (*a ngi m vumeli* in Ibaible 1893) and applies it to the male. Again, Shembe chooses to use the language Paul directs at women for the purposes of addressing men instead.

In the next instruction, “The Law for Leaders Who Wish to Marry”,²²⁸ Shembe either makes a concession or distinguishes between ‘ministers’ and ‘preachers’ (see below), for he says “If someone who is a preacher [*umuntu*

One of the interesting features of Hexham’s version is that he emends Londa Shembe’s version from time to time. In most cases the emendations are not very significant, but he does quite frequently emend biblical references. Given Isaiah Shembe’s diverse ways of re-memorizing scripture, emendations are a problematic editorial practice. In the later work edited by Robert Papini and Irving Hexham, Papini notes in his *Introduction* that, “Bible references have been retained [in *The Catechism*] exactly as in the original, on the strength of Hexham’s suggestion that such an editorial choice (i.e. not to ‘correct’) be made in view of the possibility that they are in fact true reflections of the prophet’s or redactor’s use of scripture, in what is a ‘creative’ or inspired manner, as per Jesus, Paul and the Gospel writers”; Papini, “Introduction,” xxi, note 58. Hexham does indeed say this, but nevertheless does make emendations. Fortunately, Hexham always provides the original manuscript reading in a footnote whenever he makes an emendation.

225 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 72–73. This is “The Advice of Shembe” in Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 16–17, item 7. And is “The Commandments of the Servant of Suffering, Shembe” in Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 12–13, item 1.7.

226 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 72.

227 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 73.

228 This is “The Law Concerning Ministers Who Want to Get Married” in Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 17–18, item 8. And is “Law for Leaders Who Wish to Be Married” in Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 103–104, item 7.4.

ongumshumayeli]²²⁹ desires more than anything else to marry a second wife, and then does just that, if he marries with the agreement of his [first]²³⁰ wife, it should not disrupt his actual preaching, if we go by the precedent of Laban and Jacob”.²³¹ Shembe then offers a supporting interpretation from the Genesis story of Jacob marrying Laban’s first born daughter and then his second born daughter, as well as their respective maids, Bilha and Zelipha (Genesis 29–30): “Laban made Jacob swear that he would never again marry other women and would from then on marry only Laban’s daughters (Genesis 31 verse 43). Laban ignored the case of Bilha who was not his daughter, she was Jacob’s junior wife whom he married not of his own free choice. Jacob then married Rachel. Nor did Laban include Zelipha, Jacob’s fourth wife, because she was chosen by Leah, his senior wife (Genesis 30 v 3–16)”. While the biblical citation in the second instance does refer directly to Bilhah and Zilpah, the first instance is once again a general reference to, in this case, the long narrative of the tendentious relationship between Laban and Jacob. Genesis 31:43 affirms Laban’s claim to his daughters, but goes on to offer his willingness to form a covenant with Jacob provided Jacob cares for his daughters: “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me” (Genesis 31:49–50, NAS). However, Shembe does not develop his argument here directly, allowing the biblical texts to do their independent work, forming lines of connection and association with other aspects of Shembe’s teachings.

As we have seen above, the issue here seems to be the consent of the (first) wife, for Shembe goes on to say that, “If a preacher [*umshumayeli*]²³² simply chooses for himself with no agreement from his wife, he need not be expelled from the church, nor need he be removed from all his Godly work, but we will not allow him to preach”.²³³ Shembe immediately goes on to argue that in the case of a minister (*umuntu enumfundisi*)²³⁴—so it now becomes clear that

229 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 74.

230 This is Gunners’s square bracket.

231 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 75. Shembe engages at some length with the story of Jacob and Laban, finding in this biblical narrative of a polygamous family many resonances with the cultural and economic contours of his time.

232 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 74.

233 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 75.

234 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 74.

there is a difference between these two offices—who “desperately wishes to marry, whether his wife agrees or not, Zinzilini the great ruler of Nazareth does not allow it”.²³⁵

These two teachings on marrying a second wife are instructive in that they make it clear that a man may have more than one ‘rib’ destined for him, but that this depends on his particular vocation and office in the church.²³⁶ Interestingly, while the rhetoric of Genesis subsumes the rhetoric of 1 Timothy in the case of the prime responsibility for adultery (see above), here the rhetoric of 1 Timothy subsumes the rhetoric of Genesis when it comes to circumscribing how many women the minister (*umfundisi*) may marry. For Paul (in 1 Timothy) and Shembe here, the higher office of minister comes with certain restrictions.

But Shembe is quick to add in his teaching, and Paul would probably approve, that if the minister persists in marrying a second wife, he is not lost to the church, though he cannot take the office of minister: “He may simply be a member of the church, and if there is a meeting he should be invited and he may join in debate because he knows the [church] law. He may attend meetings and answer what he is fit to answer. We must not lose his contribution”.²³⁷ It is also important to note that here, as elsewhere in his teachings (see above), he does not use the designations of 1 Timothy for church offices: bishop/overseer (*umbonisi*) or deacon (*izikonzi*), reminiscent as they are of missionary-*kholwa* Christianity; he prefers his own Ibandla lamaNazaretha-derived designations.

235 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 74.

236 In an item from *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, Shembe limits the number of wives of an ordinary member; in this case Chief Mambuka Mthiyane may have up to six, citing Deuteronomy 17:15, 19; Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 33, item 3.2. Speaking to a chief, Shembe says, “if you succeed in getting married, do not take many wives: Once you have taken six, do not take any more (Deuteronomy 17, 15, 19). And do not accept bribery”. The biblical text (Deuteronomy 17:17), speaking about the restrictions that should be observed by the king, says, “He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself” (NAS). We notice here that Shembe connects, as does Deuteronomy, excess in wives and excess in wealth. What Shembe adds is the element of unjust wealth, perhaps implied by Deuteronomy.

237 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 75.

In “Doctrine for Worshippers”²³⁸ Shembe returns (in a manner of speaking) to adultery. Having discussed at length the importance of living what they preach, Shembe says that he has “another piece of advice for you [preacher of the Lord (*mshumayeli weNkosi*)]²³⁹ related to what I have just said”.²⁴⁰ He then goes on,

If a minister or an evangelist or a preacher at any time commits adultery with another man’s wife, even if he has parted with the woman he will never shake that sin off; because if one person says, “Don’t commit adultery”, the other will say, “Why not, it’s not a big thing”, being simply unable to shake that sin off because he’s noted that you, minister, if you commit adultery you are doing so in the presence of an angel.

You have broken God’s law over that woman, and others will take it as an example and say, “It’s nothing.” Take up your words and use them for your own forgiveness and not only for the forgiveness of other people. You are preaching what you are in fact yourself throwing away.²⁴¹

Apart from offering further clarification on categories of leadership—minister/*umfundisi*, evangelist/*umvangeli*, preacher/*umshumayeli* (though the use of minister/*umfundisi* later as a possible superordinate term problematises the distinctions²⁴²—this instruction argues that adultery always has an audience, even when the preacher is far from home (for Shembe assumes earlier in this instruction that preachers will move about). The audience is “an angel” (*kwengilosi*).²⁴³ The reference to angels is difficult to trace back to a particular biblical text, but probably alludes, as we have seen, to “the angel of the Lord”

238 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 82–87. This is “A Teaching Concerning Servants” in Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 23–26, item 13; and “Shembe’s Teaching of the Servants” in Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 18–22, item 2.1. This item in Hexham is preceded by an item on “Shembe’s Advice Concerning Pastors, Evangelists and Preachers”; Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 22–23. However, this item does not appear in Gunner; see Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 80–83. Up to this point Hexham and Gunner are similar both in terms of the notebook items and their order (though their subheadings are different).

239 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 82.

240 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 83.

241 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 83–85.

242 But see Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 68.

243 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 84.

who “found” Hagar when she was driven out of Abraham’s household unjustly (Genesis 16:7). Shembe is inspired by “the angel of the Lord” that watches over the vulnerable, particularly vulnerable women.

But there are also angels in the Genesis story of Sodom (Genesis 19:1, 15) discussed above, as there are in 1 Corinthians (4:9, 6:3, 11:10, 13:1), another text Shembe knows and uses in his instructions on adultery. 1 Timothy 3:16 and 5:21 also contain references to angels, as do many other Old and New Testament texts. What is clear is that angels are a part of his cosmology,²⁴⁴ and that they pay attention to adultery. What is particularly important is that angels are watching men.

The only specific text that Shembe does cite in this portion of the instruction about adultery is 1 Timothy 3:6. Significantly, here the citation is a reference to a particular and apposite verse. The citation comes in an injunction to worshippers generally, but leaders (*abaholi*)²⁴⁵ in particular, to be careful about how they speak, the tongue being an unruly member (which is an allusion to James 1:26, 3:5–18, and 1 Peter 3:10). Shembe is concerned about the male leaders’ “joking talk with women,”²⁴⁶ and goes on to admonish his “spiritual brother,”²⁴⁷ saying that his “jokes are questionable.”²⁴⁸ Such ones, he continues, “appear to be worshipping but their deeds deny it. Because these are the very ones who go tiptoeing into houses and kidnap [*-thumba*]²⁴⁹ women (2 Timothy 3 v 6).”²⁵⁰ Immediately prior to this statement Shembe had overtly invoked Paul’s name, saying, “Be careful that your jokey ways don’t make you one of those whom Paul describes as The Stubborn-Natured Ones, the puffed up ones, who are far more interested in their own happiness than in loving God.”²⁵¹ Shembe now cites a specific ‘Pauline’ text to corroborate his instruction,

244 Angels feature prominently in the teachings of another African Christian leader from the same historical time and geographical place as Shembe, namely George Khambule; see Draper, “The Closed Text and the Heavenly Telephone: The Role of the *Bricoleur* in Oral Mediation of Sacred Text in the Case of George Khambule and the Gospel of John,” in *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (ed. Draper; Atlanta, Pietermaritzburg and Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature, Cluster Publications and E.J. Brill, 2003); Draper, “George Khambule and the Book of Revelation: Prophet of the Open Heaven,” *Neotestamentica* 38, no. 2 (2004).

245 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 84.

246 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 85.

247 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 87.

248 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 87.

249 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 86.

250 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 87.

251 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 87.

for 2 Timothy 3:6 reads as follows: “For among them [ie. those who are “lovers of the self . . . rather than lovers of God”] are those who enter into households and captivate [*bedusa*, *-dukisa*, lead astray] weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses” (NAS).

We learn from this instruction that Shembe does on occasion refer to a particular biblical text. Though direct citations are rare, this is a very good example of a quite specific citation. However, citing a particular text does not constrain Shembe to follow Paul’s view of women. While 2 Timothy is unable to hold men responsible without finding fault with women, Shembe refuses Paul’s orientation. Shembe omits Paul’s characterisation of these women as “weak”. However, I do not want to overstate the difference between Paul and Shembe here. It could be argued that Paul’s women are active, and therefore dangerous, while Shembe’s women tend to be passive, and therefore are not as responsible as men. For Paul women are inherently weak, for Shembe they are passive, they tend to remain the objects of mens’ volition.²⁵²

As I have indicated, Irving Hexham’s version of “Histories and Laws”, entitled “Some Prayers and Writings of the Servant of Sorrows: Isaiah Shembe”, includes a large number of pieces not in Gunner’s extract.²⁵³ Of these only

252 But in an item from *The Catechism*, not found in either Hexham or Gunner, Shembe foregrounds the agency of women. In warning the “people of Thembalimbe” not to use “the home of God” as “a forest where the young men and the maidens court each other”, Shembe singles out the role of the young maidens/virgins: “Now all the maidens of Thembalimbe choose a husband here in the home, from the young men with whom they live and worship. This is not right”. In the same item Shembe tells of how in another “home of God” “the young men rose up and besieged the maidens in that home of God at Mpuza”. Using the house of God to engage in any kind of courting behaviour, particular *ukuhlobonga* (“pre-marital sex-play”) “is an offence to the Angels who are protecting this home of God”, and God will destroy those homes where such practices take place, as God destroyed the biblical city of Gibeah in Judges 19:14; Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 32–33, item 3.1.

253 Hexham’s collection includes two pieces that are not in Gunner between “The Words of Shembe Messenger of God” (94–95) and “The Words of Counsel of Shembe at Ekuphakameni, March 4, 1932” (98–99), which are “The Letter to the Chief Mqedi Mthiyane: by the Mouth of the Servant Shembe” (30) and “The Names of the People of Mpuza Who Died Suddenly for Transgressing the Law of Jehovah” (31). Following “The Second Set of Counsels from Shembe for Ministers” (104–104 in Gunner; 37 in Hexham), Hexham includes an item not in Gunner, “The Law Concerning Cleansing of People, Ekuphakameni, August 7, 1932” (38). Gunner then includes an item not in Hexham, “The Prophecy of Shembe April 1923” (108–109) and Hexham includes another item not in Gunner, “Shembe’s Prayer: A Memorial to the Mourning for His Nation” (40). After “The First Words of Advice of Shembe at Rosboom August 26, 1933 (110–113 in Gunner;

three deal with marriage and adultery or related matters. The first of these, “The Beginning of the Story of Johannes Mlangeni, the Son of Jwili at Nhlankakazi, January 17, 1934”, is especially interesting in that it is a case study of a particular individual’s serial “lust”²⁵⁴ and the consequences of this on the individual himself, the church, and society. Though only in part about adultery, the major focus being this person’s “proposing love to girls who were members of his flock”,²⁵⁵ Shembe uses biblical texts that we have encountered above, including 2 Timothy 3:5.²⁵⁶ In addition to this text and a number of references to Deuteronomy, Shembe makes explicit reference to Matthew 5:28–29 (“... but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (NAS)), 2 Samuel 11:2 (“Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king’s house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance” (NAS)), Proverbs 6:25 (“Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids (NAS)), and Job 31:1 (“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (NAS)).²⁵⁷ What is remarkable about this compendium of texts is their resonance with each other. This kind of consonance shows just how familiar Shembe is with his Bible; only regular and extensive reading/hearing

40–42 in Hexham), Hexham has two items not in Gunner, “The Second Advice: Shembe’s Mourning. Ekuphakameni, September 23, 1933” (42) and “The Prayer to Confess Their Sins on Behalf of His Nation” (43). The next four items are similar, and appear to be based on the same or a similar manuscript. Gunner concludes her selection with “The Words of the Servant Shembe at Judea in Zululand December 12, 1929” (124–135; 52–57 in Hexham). Hexham’s collection continues with another forty six items (58–104). The differences described here, and in other footnotes, including differences in dates, deserves fuller attention, and requires a careful analysis of the handwritten original with which Gunner worked. Furthermore, both Hexham’s and Gunner’s collections need to be located within the redactional history that Papini attempts to reconstruct. For example, in Appendix 4 of their *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, Robert Papini and Irving Hexham provide a list of items which are in Hexham’s 1994 collection but not in *The Catechism*; Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 240–241. Of the items in *The Catechism* which are not in Hexham (1994) and Gunner, only those I have referred to above deal directly with marriage and adultery. My selections are of the material that is attributable to Isaiah Shembe; see Papini, “Introduction.”

254 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 67.

255 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 68.

256 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 69.

257 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 69.

can generate this kind of comprehensive collection of diverse texts dealing with a similar theme.

In an untitled piece,²⁵⁸ Shembe addresses an individual who is threatening suicide if he is not “given the Fakazi girl”.²⁵⁹ “We refused”, says Shembe, “although you begged us at night and during the day”.²⁶⁰ In what follows in this brief item, it appears as though this person’s threat of suicide has gained him “that girl”.²⁶¹ However, says Shembe,

Now if you have been given that girl what forgiveness do you now seek? Although you may seek that forgiveness with tears, you will not receive it. (Hebrews 12:14–17). The only forgiveness that you will ever receive is written in that chapter. For you sold the birthright of your Ministry to the lust of your flesh.

You must read there and understand (Genesis 25:33). And you too have sold the birthright of our Ministry to your brothers. And now you will never get it back.²⁶²

Here we see again that a man is not entitled to a woman. In this case, the congregation (“we”) refused to give this man a particular woman; perhaps they discerned that she was not ‘the rib’ intended for him. That this man persisted is seen as a sign of his failure to control the lust of his flesh. Self-control is expected, says Shembe, of those in ministry. The two texts cited, both referring to the story in which Esau gives up his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of stew, unable to control his desire for food, are used to support Shembe’s argument.

What these biblical texts too reveal is Shembe’s detailed and comprehensive knowledge of scripture; in this case he draws on an intratextual reference to the same narrative, but across the testaments, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. Indeed, there is no indication that this distinction between the testaments is even recognised by Shembe, signalling another difference in Shembe’s appropriation of the Bible from missionary-*kholwa* Christianity.

258 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 73, item 42.

259 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 73.

260 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 73.

261 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 73.

262 Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 73.

The third and final teaching which has some connection with the issue of adultery picks up on a concern in the above two teachings, that of the responsible behaviour of the minister (for the person being discussed in the instruction is a minister in the Congregation of the amaNazaretha). In this next teaching, in the form of a letter ("There is Danger in Disobedience"),²⁶³ Shembe addresses "Mngoma", instructing him thus: "You must scrupulously strengthen the work of Thixo with a good and pure heart. You must be a good servant in the presence of Thixo, a servant without blame. You must not have eyes that are full of harlotry like many others who being of the male sex commit sodomy with others of the male sex".²⁶⁴ In warning Mngoma against "the lusts of the flesh", whether male or female flesh, Shembe uses another example, this time that of "Mlangeni [who has] committed sodomy with Bukhosini according to the lusts of his own flesh".²⁶⁵ Again, Shembe is concerned not only about the particular lust, but also about the impact of this kind of disobedience on the believing community. So he warns Mngoma that he "must avoid and have no fellowship" with such people. Instead, Shembe says, "Spread yourself under my teachings. That you may become the spring from which the believers will drink because of your good teachings".²⁶⁶ Shembe's 'law' is a site of sustenance for the individual and the community.

Not only does this instruction take the rhetorical form of Paul writing to his disciple Timothy, there are no fewer than six explicit references to particular texts in 1 and 2 Timothy. Once again, Shembe adopts both the rhetorical stance and the pastoral posture of Paul, representing his own leadership as both that of the authoritative teacher as well as that of the caring mentor.

In sum, as we have seen and heard, Shembe locates himself alongside the biblical Moses and Paul. Both are important in Shembe's project of community construction. In these teachings Shembe appropriates the authority and rhetoric of Moses the law-giver addressing the people of 'Israel' (in the Pentateuch) and the authority of rhetoric of Paul the apostle addressing the churches he has established (in the Epistles). In each case Shembe, like Prophet Harris, engages with these biblical ancestors with whom he shares the task of building community. Neither traditional African tribal authorities nor missionary-*khobwa*

²⁶³ Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 75–76.

²⁶⁴ Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 75.

²⁶⁵ Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 76.

²⁶⁶ Hexham, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha*, 76. Detailed analysis of Shembe's attitude to and instructions on 'homosexuality' is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I include this example here as an indication that there is material for such an analysis.

Christianity were able, in the view of Shembe, to construct a “moral ethnicity”,²⁶⁷ but the Bible and its ancestral figures provide Shembe with plenty of potential for both a “virtuous polity” and a “theological nationalism”, “a discourse that, to legitimate itself, posited national unity on ideas of virtue, healing, peacefulness, repentance and submission to Jehovah’s dictates”.²⁶⁸ As Joel Cabrita argues, “Shembe’s ministry was preoccupied with both ‘mourning for [his] scattered nation’ [with a particular concern for the plight of African women] and working tirelessly to re-found it upon the new social possibilities exemplified by his Nazareth communities, some of which endure to this day”.²⁶⁹

The Liturgical Bible: Maidens Performing the Bible

The related processes of mourning and re-founding identified by Cabrita are exemplified in the way Isaiah Shembe’s teaching have been taken up performatively. While Shembe’s teachings on marriage and adultery, a core corpus of Isaiah Shembe’s instructions, tend to draw on the didactic genres (including legal and letter texts) of the Bible, Isaiah Shembe was also attentive to the extended narrative texts of the Bible in his teaching on the relationships between men and women. Judges 11 is a good example of how Shembe appropriated biblical narrative, weaving into the very fabric of the liturgical life of his community.

Significantly, this biblical text does not have an evident reception history in South Africa prior to Shembe’s appropriation, and this particular story has no liturgical reception history within missionary Christianity generally. The ‘liturgy’ or ‘rule’ in which this biblical story is located is preserved in “The Nazarite Catechism”, in the material attributable to the “Revived Law” of Isaiah Shembe’s son, Johannes Galilee Shembe. “The Nazarite Catechism”, compiled by Petros Dhlomo, consists of two parts. Part one contains “Material Attributable to the

267 Cabrita, “A Theological Biography of Isaiah Shembe, C.1870–1935” (University of Cambridge, 2008).

268 Cabrita, “Isaiah Shembe’s Theological Nationalism,” 618, 609.

269 Cabrita, “Isaiah Shembe’s Theological Nationalism,” 625. The focus of this chapter is the biblical hermeneutics of Isaiah Shembe. For some analysis of the contemporary biblical hermeneutics of the communities Isaiah Shembe founded, see Sithole, “Acquiescence or Resistance? The Role of the Aic in the Struggle against Apartheid,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 137 (2010); Sithole, “An African Bible for African Readers: J.G. Shembe’s Use of the Bible in the Sermon” *Old Testament Essays* 24, no. 1 (2011).

Prophet Isaiah Shembe",²⁷⁰ and part two contains "Material Attributable to the 'Revived Law' of Johannes Galilee Shembe",²⁷¹ who led the church after Isaiah Shembe's death, from 1936 until his death in 1977.

The focus of the "Revived Law" is a codifying of the liturgical life of Ibandla lamaNazaretha, given the concerns of J.G. Shembe and his ministers in the 1960s "that certain deviations, amounting to a broad shift in the original ordained style of worship, were taking place as a result of the numerical growth of the Church".²⁷² As Robert Papini puts it, "A formal statement and codification, in the form of an issue of authorized liturgical and related statutory literature, was clearly overdue, in order that extraneous forms of worship and related conduct imported by traditionalist, Zionist and mission-church converts not contaminate the 'original statute'".²⁷³ The "Revived Law" (*Umthetho Ovuselelwayo*) then was an attempt to codify and so revive the "Original Statute/Law"—it was a "Reminder of the Statute"—of Isaiah Shembe.²⁷⁴ Alongside *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha* (the Nazarite hymnal) which had already been published in 1940,²⁷⁵ there was now a need to provide a textual canonical version of the oral and performative "Original Statute/Law" of the church in a time of religio-cultural and political-economic change within the Nazarite Church, "particularly in conditions of increasing literacy among the younger generation, as the foundation of 'UbuNazaretha' (Nazarite-hood)".²⁷⁶

The detailed re-membling of Judges 11 is located within the first section of the "Revived Laws", the statutes concerning "Maidens and Marriage".²⁷⁷ The first sub-section within these statutes is "The Marriage Order of Nazareth",²⁷⁸ the second is "Rules Concerning the Inspection of the Maidens",²⁷⁹ the third is "The Prayer to Bless the Children of the Nazarites",²⁸⁰ and the fourth and final

270 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 2–112. See Papini's reconstructions of the production of this material; Papini, "Introduction," xiii–xxxi.

271 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 113–178. See Papini's reconstructions of the production of this material; Papini, "Introduction," xxxi–xxxvi.

272 Papini, "Introduction," xxxiv.

273 Papini, "Introduction," xxxiv.

274 Papini, "Introduction," xxxiv.

275 Papini, "Introduction," xviii.

276 Papini, "Introduction," xxxv–xxxvi.

277 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 113.

278 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 113.

279 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 116.

280 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 117.

sub-section is “The Rule Concerning the Maidens of Nazareth on the Sabbath Day, 27 July 1933”.²⁸¹ This section of statutes is then followed by “The Order of Burial in the Nazareth Church”.²⁸² The section on “Maidens and Marriage” is not a coherent liturgy, moving from one moment in the liturgy to another; indeed, there are no rubrics to link the sub-sections. “Maidens and Marriage” clearly codifies liturgical moments in the life of Ibandla lamaNazareth that are understood within their performative contexts.

The sub-section that is the focus of our analysis here, “The Rule Concerning the Maidens of Nazareth on the Sabbath Day, 27 July 1933”, is composed itself of three movements, with the transitions between these liturgical movements left unscripted. The “Rule” begins with a list of numbered statements, authorising the “Rule”. This is followed in a second movement by a hymn, with each of the two verses numbered (1 and 2), and then two further numbered statements, citing the words of Isaiah Shembe (numbered 3 and 4). The third movement is the re-membered, liturgically re-written narrative of Judges 11:30–40. The liturgy then concludes in a third movement with another hymn.

In what follows we will engage with the “Rule” in its totality. The “Rule” begins, in its first movement, as follows:

1. This letter confirms the rule for the maidens of amaNazareth: in the appointed months, they shall always meet in the presence of Jehova, according to the rule.
2. This is an unchanging rule amongst you, maidens of amaNazareth: On the 25th of every July will be the day of meeting for all the maidens of amaNazareth under the sun’s shadow.
3. Likewise, the 25th of September will always be the great opening dance of the great four-day ceremony for all Nazarite maidens under the sun, in the four compass-points of the world.
4. Blessed are those who keep this rule, and pass this ceremony on to the coming generations, so that they will always follow it.²⁸³

That this “Rule” “confirms” and revives an earlier rule deriving from Isaiah Shembe himself is supported by the dating of this “Rule” to 1933, the same date incidentally of Shembe’s parabolic sermon on the “The Liberating Bible” (see above). There is further evidence of this provenance when we compare this first moment to the didactic material directly attributed to Shembe in

²⁸¹ Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 118.

²⁸² Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 120.

²⁸³ Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 118.

“Histories and Laws”. Here we find a similar echo of the rhetoric of the authoritative biblical speakers, including in the case of the second instruction Moses (Leviticus 16:34) and in the case of the fifth instruction the Psalmist/David (Psalm 106:3 and 119:2), Jesus (Luke 11:28, Matthew 5:3–11), and the John of Revelation (Revelation 1:3).

The “Rule” then shifts from instruction to worship in the form of “Hymn 92”:

1
 I shall dance with hope.
 Being a maiden of Nazareth,
 I shall fear nothing,
 For I am perfect.

2
 We also trust in you.
 Even yesterday we trusted in you,
 And today we trust in you,
 And tomorrow, also,
 We shall still trust in you.²⁸⁴

The hymn seems to introduce a second movement in the liturgy because its verses are numbered in such a way as to link it into the quotations from Isaiah Shembe that follow (below). This Nazarite hymn recasts the story of Jephthah’s daughter, minimising its anguish, affirming instead the complete trust of the female virgins in God (and Shembe). For these virgins there will be a “tomorrow”, though for Jephthah’s daughter there is none. So the hope of the first line is not misplaced. Though it will turn to lament, the liturgy at this stage in the “Rule” is characterised by hope, a hope embodied by the dance of the maidens of amaNazaretha, but participated in by the whole community, including the maidens’ parents.

The citation of this hymn is followed, as an integral part of the hymn (as the numbering indicates) by a reiteration of Isaiah Shembe’s instructions as to the role of the parents of the girl virgins:

3. At the Mchunu country in April, 1933, the Lord of Eluphakameni [Isaiah Shembe] said these words: “In all the temples, parents should examine whether the maidens are virgins, so that they may be worthy to stand before God when they come to their meetings in the presence of Jehova”.

284 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 118–119.

4. He said: “In all the large temples, there should be twenty-four maidens who are virgins, in medium-sized temples there should be twelve maidens, and in the small temples, there should be six maidens who are virgins. You parents must ensure that they are worthy to dance for Jehova”.²⁸⁵

Shembe here allocates a role to the parents of the maidens, thereby acknowledging traditional hierarchies and roles. However, these traditional roles are reconfigured by the “Rule” and its biblical appropriations, as we will see.

The “Rule” then immediately moves into a retelling or re-membling of the Judges 11 story, under the heading “Judges 11:30–40”.

1. Japhet [Jephthah] made a vow before Jehova, saying: ‘If Jehova will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from my house to meet me, when I return victorious from war, shall be a burnt offering to Jehova from my hand’. And indeed, Jehova gave the Ammonites into the hands of Japhet.
2. Japhet came back to his home at Mizpah. Behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. She was his only daughter; besides her he had no other children. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said: ‘Alas, my daughter! You have brought me down, and you cause me great torment. I have opened my mouth to Jehova, and I cannot take back my vow’.
3. His daughter said: ‘Father, do to me what you promised to Jehova, for Jehova has given your enemies into your hands. I agree to become an offering to Jehova. But, I ask you to let me alone for two months, that I may go to the mountains and mourn my virginity together with my companions’ (*Psalms* 38).²⁸⁶

In order to analyse what Shembe has done with the biblical text in re-membling it, the following table is useful. The first column contains Shembe’s version in its English translation, as above. The second column contains the 1893 *Ibaible eliNgcwele* (Holy Bible) that Shembe would have used.²⁸⁷ And the third column contains a fairly literal ‘back translation’ by a professional Bible translator with many years of experience.²⁸⁸ This enables us to compare columns one and three in English and isiZulu.

²⁸⁵ Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 119.

²⁸⁶ Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 119–120.

²⁸⁷ IBaible, *Ibaible Eli Ingcwele* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1893).

²⁸⁸ I am most grateful to Eric Hermanson for assisting me with this fairly literal English translation of the ‘old’ (1893) isiZulu Bible.

Shembe's version	Ibaible	Literal Translation
1. Japhet made a vow before Jehova, saying: 'If Jehova will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from my house to meet me, when I return victorious from war, shall be a burnt offering to Jehova from my hand'. And indeed, Jehova gave the Ammonites into the hands of Japhet.	30 uJefeta wa zibopa kuJehova ngesibopo, wa ti, Uma u nikela abaka Amoni esandhleni sami impela, 31 Kona ku za kuti, loko oku pumayo emnyango wendhlu yami ukuza kungihlangabeza, nxa ngi buya kahle kwabaka Amoni, ko ba okukaJehova, e ngi ya kukunikela ku be umnikelo wokutyiswa. 32 Kwa njalo uJefeta wa dhululela kwabaka Amoni ukulwa nabo; uJehova wa ba nikela esandhleni sake. 33 Wa ba bulala ku suka eAroeri ku ze ku fike eMiniti, imizi emashumi amabili, ku ze ku fike eAbelkeramimi, ngokubulala okukulu. Kwa njalo abaka Amoni ba nqotywa abaka Israeli.	30 Jephthah bound himself to Jehovah with an obligation, saying, If you give the people/ children/sons of Ammon into my hand indeed, 31 then it will be that whatever comes out of the door of my house to come to meet me, when I return well from the sons of Ammon, it will be Jehovah's, and I will give it as a burnt offering. 32 Then Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; Jehovah gave them into his hand. 33 He killed them from Aroer up to Minnith, twenty cities, up until Abelkeramin, a great slaughter. So the sons of Ammon were conquered by the sons of Israel.
2. Japhet came back to his home at Mizpah. Behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. She was his only daughter; besides her he had no other children. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said: 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me down, and you cause me great torment. I have opened my mouth to Jehova, and I cannot take back my vow'.	34 uJefeta weza eMizpa endhlini yake, bheka, kwa puma intombi yake ukumhlangabeza, i za nezigubu nokusina; ya i ukupela komntwana wake, ngapandhle kwayo wa e nge nandodana nantombi. 35 Kwa ti, e sa i bona, wa hxebula izingubo zake, wa ti, Au, mntanami, u ya ngi tobisa kakulu; u ngowaba ngi hlupayo; ngi vulile umlomo wami kuJehova, ngi nge buye.	34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter came to meet him, with drums and with dancing; she was his only child, besides her he had no other son or daughter. 35 It came about that when he saw her, he tore his clothes, saying, Oh, my child, you have caused me to be brought low, you are one of those who trouble me; I have opened my mouth to Jehovah, and I cannot go back.

(cont.)

Shembe's version	Ibaible	Literal Translation
3. His daughter said: 'Father, do to me what you promised to Jehova, for Jehova has given your enemies into your hands.	36 Ya ti kuye, Baba, uma u vulile umlomo wako kuJehova, yenza kimi njengokupumileyo emlonyeni wako, loku uJehova u ku pindisele eziteni zako, abaka Amoni.	36 She said to him, Father, if you have opened your mouth to Jehovah, do to me according to what has proceeded from your mouth, because Jehovah has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.
I agree to become an offering to Jehova. But, I ask you to let me alone for two months, that I may go to the mountains and mourn my virginity together with my companions' (<i>Psalms</i> 38).	37 Ya ti kuyise, Ma ngenzelwe loku, ngi yeke izinyanga ezimbili ukuba ngi ye ngehlele ezintabeni, ngi lilele ubuntombi bami, mina nabazana nami.	37 And she said to him, May this be done to me, leave me for two months so that I may go down into the mountains, and mourn my virginity, me and my companions with me.

It is important to note, at the outset, that Shembe engages with only a part of the Jephthah narrative. The story of the judge Jephthah is an extended narrative (Judges 11:1–40). The first part of the narrative (verses 1–29) focuses on Jephthah's family history and his rise to power as a judge in the tribe of Gilead, during a time when the loose 'confederation' of tribes known as 'Israel' was at war with the Ammonites.²⁸⁹ This first part of the narrative has strong socio-political and geo-political themes which could have been taken up by Isaiah Shembe. But he ignores this first part of the narrative and concentrates on the significant familial-patrimonial sub-plot concerning Jephthah and his daughter (verses 30–40), where the dominant theme concerns a religious vow. That Shembe delimits the larger narrative in this way indicates both his primary focus, on the patrimonial family, as well as his adeptness with discerning the literary units that constitute the larger narrative whole.

Shembe's re-membered text follows the isiZulu Bible, though with some significant re-writing. Verse 32a is omitted: "Then Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them". What matters to Shembe is the result, in

²⁸⁹ The terms I have placed in inverted commas are contested terms within biblical scholarship; see for example Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

32b, which is retained, though with an introductory “And indeed” to fill in for the missing section. By omitting 32a Shembe’s version is more immediate, with no narrative pause between the vow and its fulfilment by God. Similarly, verse 33 is also omitted, in which we read: “He killed them from Aroer up to Minnith, twenty cities, up until Abelkeramin, a great slaughter. So the sons of Ammon were conquered by the sons of Israel”. In appropriating his text Shembe not only emphasises certain aspects, such as God’s immediate response to Jephthah’s vow, he also loosens the text from its larger literary context, the war with the Ammonites (though he may expect the performers of this ritual to re-member the larger literary context with its echoes of contestation).

Shembe’s version in this “Rule” then returns to the biblical text in verses 34 and 35. The third section of Shembe’s version has, however, a number of alterations. In verse 36 the biblical text includes Jephthah’s daughter saying, “Father, if you have opened your mouth to Jehovah . . .”, but this phrase is omitted in Shembe’s version. The conditional clause may have seemed disrespectful (though it need not be read in this way) and so may have been omitted for this reason. More likely, however, is that Shembe chooses to emphasise again the immediacy of response. Just as God responded immediately and affirmatively to Jephthah’s vow, so too now Jephthah’s daughter responds immediately and affirmatively to her father’s vow. As in the omission earlier, so too in this verse there is a further loosening of the text from its literary context, for the reference to the Ammonites is omitted in Shembe’s version of verse 36.

There is also an addition to the biblical text, with Jephthah’s daughter saying in Shembe’s version, “I agree to become an offering to Jehova”. The compliance is complete. And it is further emphasised by the ending Shembe chooses. It ends with the words of the virgin daughter (in verse 37), not the words of the narrator (verses 38–40), as is the case in the biblical text. The biblical text ends as follows (verses 38–40), yet these verses are omitted, even though the “Rule” introduces the biblical text with the subheading “Judges 11:30–40”:

Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year (NAS).

Her willingness to comply for the sake of her father (and her community) is the final word. Her compliance, removed from the literary context of her

death, allows the related emphasis on the two month virginity ritual to be the story's final word. We should note too that Shembe's appropriation of this text includes seclusion of the maidens of Ibandla lamaNazaretha for the full two months claimed by Jephthah's daughter and her companions and not the four days designated by the narrator.²⁹⁰

As indicated above, the "Rule" cites the entire sub-unit (Judges 11:30–40), but only uses parts of it. While the 'fuller' narrative hovers in the background, in the Bible, it is Shembe's re-membered version that is ritually recited and performed.

However, although Jephthah's daughter's death and the lament of her companions, "the daughters of Israel" (verse 40), are not narrated in the "Rule", they are danced and sung in the hymn (referred to here as a Psalm) which immediately follows, Hymn 38:

1
I shall go alone
Into the valley of sorrow.
Chorus: Give me that strength
Of Japhet's daughter.

2
I too shall go alone
Into my grave.
Chorus

3
I shall lament alone.
Chorus

4
The way of the grave is fearful;
Although all will walk in it, they do not wish to.
*Chorus*²⁹¹

In the "Rule" this is the ultimate word, allowing a place for lament and acknowledging the cost of the compliance. Within the literary liturgical setting of the "Rule", the enemies of Jephthah/Israel/Shembe/Ibandla lamaNazaretha are not given much prominence. What is given prominence is the integral relationship between members of the community, specifically, Shembe, the Nazarite

290 West, "Layers of Reception of Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11) among the AmaNazaretha: From the Early 1900s to Today." See also the discussion below.

291 Papini and Hexham, *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings*, 120.

maidens, their parents, the coming generations, the indirectly evoked biblical witness of Moses, David, Jesus, and the apostles, the directly cited presence of Jephthah and his daughter, and God. What binds them together (against their enemies, for sure, though this is not foregrounded in the “Rule”) is their interdependence, forged liturgically through their compliance to the “Rule”.

Within the “Rule” there are hierarchies of compliance, though these are complex and dynamic. The “Rule” begins by confirming that it is Shembe’s “Rule” and so Shembe’s authority is invoked over the maidens. Immediately, however, the first hymn shifts the maidens to a significant position in the hierarchy, for they “shall fear nothing”, for they “are perfect”. There is a further shift, however, in the second stanza, where the maidens declare their trust in God (and Shembe). The instructions that then follow the hymn grant the parents of the maidens authority over them (under Shembe’s direct instruction), but both the parents and Shembe then retreat to the margins of the ritual performance as the maidens alone “dance for Jehova”. The Judges text, partially rewritten by Shembe, establishes a clear line of authority, from Jehovah to Jephthah to his daughter. And yet Jephthah’s daughter, like her Nazarite sisters, by boldly declaring that she agrees “to become an offering to Jehova” enables her father to keep his vow to Jehovah, and so (in Shembe’s reconstruction and location of the narrative) to maintain the integrity of the community. The final lament, Hymn 38, reveals the cost of such community.

“Psalm 38”, referred to in parenthesis after the liturgically re-membered version of the biblical narrative, may refer to the biblical Psalm, which is an individual lament, similar to Hymn 38. However, there is no close literary relationship between Psalm 38 and Hymn 38 other than this. Perhaps the reference to Psalm 38 is another of Shembe’s general allusions to the Bible, signalling here both a recognition of Jephthah’s daughter lament and the place of lament of in the life of Ibandla lamaNazaretha. Or perhaps the reference to Psalm 38 is merely another way of referring to Hymn 38 from the Nazarite hymnal.

The Communal Bible: Corporate Interpretation

My interest in this chapter, as throughout this book, is on the historical and hermeneutical dimensions of African appropriations of the Bible. Isaiah Shembe provides an instructive case-study because, though surrounded by and immersed within the colonial and missionary forms of Christianity in Southern Africa of the late 1800s and early 1900s, he nevertheless claims the Bible, asserting the agency of neo-indigenous African communities both in the stealing of the Bible and in the interpretation of the Bible. So my primary interest is in that historical moment of African ‘reception’.

I am less interested (in this book) in how Isaiah Shembe's appropriation of the Bible has been re-appropriated by his followers, in the various 'schisms' of Ibandla lamaNazaretha that have followed his death. But a brief reflection on the reception history of the Judges 11 story may be useful here as a reminder that the interpretive moments I have chosen in this book are just that, significant synchronic moments.

Others have done some work on the reception of Judges 11 in the later life of the Nazarite Church, in the years following Isaiah Shembe's death in 1935 and Johannes Galilee's death in 1977. Carol Muller's interest in Judges 11 comes via her primary interest in the performance of religion by the amaNazaretha. The performances that are the focus of her research include "religious song and dance, dream and miracle narratives, and fertility rituals that focus specifically on the female members".²⁹² She is particularly interested in the relationship between "ritual and the sacrifice of desire", examining Nazarite ritual practices and expressive forms "as one of the means through which to begin to understand the experiences of thousands of black South African women and young girls who have lived through the twentieth century on the margins of a continually changing South African political economy".²⁹³ Her research was undertaken between 1991–1997,²⁹⁴ immensely important years in the formation of a 'new' democratic South Africa. Muller, as a South African, recognises that her subjects, like millions of South Africans, were at this time "filled with an inordinate sense of both hope and disappointment in the possibilities presented by the larger historical moment".²⁹⁵

As a white South African Muller is attentive to post-colonial concerns about the kind of ethnographic research she is doing,²⁹⁶ part of which includes being overt about the frameworks that inform and shape her research. Her 'reception' of the amaNazaretha reception of Isaiah Shembe's reception of Judges 11 (as represented by his son Johannes Galilee) is framed by her interests, as I have indicated, in the changing face of South Africa's political economy, in general, and in the presence and place of women in this changing political economy, in particular.²⁹⁷

For Muller, in order to move the African peoples of KwaZulu-Natal "into a selective involvement with the emergent industrial economy in the early twentieth century", Isaiah Shembe blended traditional Nguni beliefs and biblical

292 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 1.

293 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 1–2.

294 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 3.

295 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 3.

296 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 16–19.

297 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 263–265.

narrative.²⁹⁸ According to Muller, Shembe's belief in the power of the pure female body was derived both from "traditional Zulu beliefs regarding the power of young female virgins to safeguard the well-being of communities"²⁹⁹ and from the biblical story of Jephthah and his daughter in Judges 11. "As the story of Jephthah and his daughter demonstrates", says Muller "for the Nazarite community to be victorious in its war against racial injustice, the girls are required to offer their virtuous bodies in obedience to the will of the prophet/God".³⁰⁰

"These young female virgins", Muller goes on to argue, "are also the actors in two annual Nazarite rituals that draw on traditional Nguni custom", and which Isaiah Shembe and his followers re-created "sometime in the late 1920s to establish the particularities of Nazarite experience".³⁰¹ The first of these rituals "derives from the traditional puberty rite held for an individual girl on her first menstruation. Known as the 'girls' conference' or *umgonqo* (seclusion/confinement), it takes place at the church headquarters as a collective rite between July 25 and September 25". The second rite "is linked to one of the first stages in a girl's sexual interactions with a boy. This is the 'girl's camp' or Ntanda (to love/braid), held through the night of July 7 at a place called Nkatheni (the place of grass ropes), and continuing on into the afternoon of July 8".³⁰²

With respect to the former, argues Muller, Shembe "transformed this rite from an individual to a collective process", moving the traditional puberty ritual "from being simply a rite of passage into full sexuality and the capacity for reproduction, to one that transferred the significance of her newly acquired fertility to the moral and spiritual domain. In other words, a girl's fertility was now harnessed by Shembe for the reproduction of the Nazarite moral and spiritual order".³⁰³ One of the mechanisms of this appropriation is the biblical narrative of Jephthah's daughter, for "interwoven into the Nazarite construction and exegesis of this rite is the biblical narrative of Jephthah and his daughter".³⁰⁴

Muller's reading/reception of Judges 11 is thus shaped by the reception of this text by the amaNazarethas as she does her research among them in the early 1990s, and, as is evident, by her understanding of the struggle of Isaiah Shembe with the forms of colonialism in KwaZulu-Natal in the early 1900s. Her account /reception of the biblical text is as follows:

298 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 161.

299 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 194.

300 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 198.

301 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 178–179.

302 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 179.

303 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 179.

304 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 179.

The story centers on Jephthah, a social misfit because he was born of a prostitute and rejected by the legitimate sons of his father. But he was also an Israelite warrior who was forced into battle with the Ammonites over the issue of land. He made an agreement with God that if the Israelites won the battle, he would sacrifice the first thing that met his eyes on his return home. To his horror, this was his only daughter. She agreed to the sacrifice on one condition, that he give her two months “to roam the hills and weep with [her] friends” because she would never marry (Judges 11:37). In response, an Israelite custom developed in which young girls entered a period of seclusion to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah.

The Nazarite girls’ ritual performance is thus framed by the metaphor of warfare—though in their case it is not the literal warfare engaged in by the biblical Jephthah. With Isaiah [Shembe], war is waged instead at the level of morality and spirituality. In this sense, the ‘daughters of Isaiah,’ like the ‘daughter of Jephthah,’ have an integral role to play in both the warfare and the victory over the enemy.³⁰⁵

Though Muller goes on to analyse the two rituals in detail,³⁰⁶ she does not engage with the “Rule” itself and makes little further reference to the appropriation of Judges 11. So it is difficult, from her account, to have a precise sense of how the “Rule” (and its biblical text) have been re-membered and possibly (re-) configured in the life of the Nazarite Church in the period she is researching.

As I have said, I undertake this archaeological work in order to understand the sedimentary layers on which contemporary African biblical interpretation is based. I also encourage my students to do this kind of historical and hermeneutical work, documenting the reception of the Bible in their own communities from their insider, emic, perspectives. One of my students, Nkosinathi Sithole, is a member of the amaNazareth, being part of the church led until recently by Vimbeni Shembe (a grandson of Isaiah Shembe, who died in 2011). I asked him to read my reading of Isaiah Shembe’s reading of Judges 11 and to offer his understanding/reception of how this text is used in contemporary Nazarite tradition.

He demonstrates a number of differences between my reading of the historical textual tradition, Muller’s ethnographic reading, and his understanding of the contemporary liturgical tradition. Whereas both Muller and I (both ‘outsiders’ to the amaNazareth community) have read the historical record as having a communal focus, he discerns a more individual focus in the way

305 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 180.

306 Muller, *Nazarite Women’s Performance in South Africa*, 180–196.

the story of Jephthah's daughter is ritualised today. He begins his engagement with my reading by indicating, like Muller, that there are two rituals that "are linked to and continuous with each other", not only "because they are for virgin girls", but also because "both are related to the story of Jephthah's³⁰⁷ daughter" and so "they kind of complete each other".³⁰⁸ Sithole says in his response to my reading that how he represents these two rituals "is common knowledge in the Church", but that in response to my request for his reading of my reading he has also "had interviews with virgin girls who take part in these rituals and one married woman, MaNtanzu Mhlongo, who used to stay in Ebuhleni [one of Shembe's sacred places] as a virgin girl".³⁰⁹

The first of these rituals is the *iNtanda* or *oThingweni* (long stick) ritual, and it started "after Shembe had a problem acquiring the land which is now called Ntanda". "The story (which is always told at the Ntanda ritual)",³¹⁰ says Sithole, goes that Shembe was promised by a Frenchman that he would sell his farm to Shembe, but that when Shembe went with the money he was told by a black farmworker that he had "overheard the whites saying that the farm should not be sold to a black person". "Shembe was saddened by this", says Sithole, "and went back to his congregation", where he "requested that the girls go to the farm to pray that the church should acquire it". This the young virgin girls did, and subsequently "the Frenchman sold the farm to Shembe and Shembe, as a way of thanking God, made a vow that virgin girls would go to worship at Ntanda every July seventh". "In this way", continues Sithole, "Shembe was offering his girls to God even though they were not to be a burnt offering like Jephthah's daughter".³¹¹

Sithole's telling of the *iNtanda* ritual so far resonates with my and Muller's reading of Shembe's use of the Judges 11 story, demonstrating a communal concern, and how virgin girls serve the community by enabling the community to acquire land in a social context in which colonial and missionary forces withheld land from blacks.

But Sithole goes on to note in his comments on the *iNtanda* ritual that "[i]n terms of the actual practice of this ritual, there is not much link with the Jephthah narrative, except for the telling of the text of this story".³¹² Among the

307 This is the spelling used in the Nazarite liturgy.

308 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," (Unpublished paper: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008), 1.

309 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 1, note 1.

310 Muller includes an account of this story in her book as one of the sources for these rituals; see Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 191–194.

311 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 1.

312 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 1.

activities of the ritual, which is now only one night and a day and not three days, “the leader, referred to as Mphathi or Anti (aunt) advises them on how to behave as *amakhosazane*, emphasising the fact that *iNtanda* is for virgin girls only. She then tells (or reads to) the girls the story of how the land which is now *iNtanda* was obtained and also the story of Jephthah and his daughter”.³¹³

Judges 11 is, however, a more substantial part of the second ritual, *Umgongo*, which is “ideally a two month ritual commencing on the 25th of July to the 25th of September”, though the constraints of ordinary contemporary life do not make it possible for all participants to be sequestered for the full two months. For “[d]uring this period”, says Sithole, “the girls are supposed to be closeted in their area and must have no contact at all with men”.³¹⁴

“This ritual”, Sithole confirms, still today “draws on both the biblical narrative of Jephthah and his daughter, and on a traditional rite called *umgonqo* [an Nguni puberty rite]”. “It is”, says Sithole, “a commemoration and a lament of the death of Jephthah’s daughter”, where the ritual “commences with the reading of the Jephthah text”.³¹⁵ But, Sithole argues, the emphasis of these rituals is not lament but “a celebration of the *amakhosazane*’s virginity”, where the story of Jephthah’s daughter “is used to denote the strength she displayed both in keeping her virginity and in accepting death so as to allow her father to keep his promise to God”. And while this is done “to encourage the girls to also keep their virginity until they are married”, “it is also used to encourage the whole Nazaretha community to have the same strength”. As Sithole says, “Shembe seems to have valued the kind of bravery displayed by Jephthah’s daughter especially”.³¹⁶

It is at this point in his analysis that Sithole argues for a different emphasis, an argument he develops at length in his doctoral thesis.³¹⁷ The Nazaretha Hymn No. 38, sung by the entire congregation during the *umgonqo* ritual, has each and every member asking of Jehova, “Give me the strength/ Of Jephthah’s daughter”. Why Shembe valued the bravery of Jephthah’s daughter is because, says Sithole, “Shembe saw being a person of God as something so difficult it required a person to have strength if that person was to hold on to it. The valley of sorrow spoken about in stanza one [of the hymn] refers to the place in the afterlife which is like hell, where those who did not do well on earth will

313 Sithole, “Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11,” 1.

314 Sithole, “Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11,” 3.

315 Sithole, “Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11,” 3.

316 Sithole, “Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11,” 4. Here there are echoes with the story of “The Liberating Bible”; see above.

317 Sithole, “Performance, Power and Agency: Isaiah Shembe’s Hymns and the Sacred Dance in the Church of the Nazarites” (PhD, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010).

end up". This idea, Sithole notes, is a regular theme in Shembe's hymns, citing Hymn No. 218 "which also talks about the difficulty of the laws of Shembe and the suffering of those who failed to keep those laws".³¹⁸ "The idea", continues Sithole, "is that through her religious strength in keeping her virginity and in consenting to be a sacrifice to God, Jephtah's daughter must have made it to heaven, and that whoever wants to avoid the valley of sorrow, but instead go straight to heaven, must follow her example in being truthful to their faith".³¹⁹

Nkosinathi Sithole suggests a rather different form of revolution here; or perhaps, another form of revolution alongside the more usual form of revolution as resistance to colonial domination.³²⁰ Those of us (including Muller and Cabrita) who have read this latter form of revolution in Isaiah Shembe's construction of community in the early 1900s are being asked, by Sithole, to consider another dimension of his project.

Muller is clear in her ideological appropriation/reception of Isaiah Shembe's reception/appropriation of Judges 11. In his struggle to acquire land, she argues, Shembe called upon his young female followers "to fulfill certain actions", actions that "were consistent with traditional Zulu beliefs regarding the power of young female virgins to safeguard the well-being of communities". "They were, however", she goes on to argue, "transferred into a new political frame",³²¹ a transformation in which Judges 11 plays a part. "As the story of Jephthah and his daughter demonstrates", she says later, "for the Nazarite community to be victorious in its war against racial injustice, the girls are required to offer their virtuous bodies in obedience to the will of the prophet/God".³²²

Indeed, it is common practice for 'outsiders' to the Church of the Nazarites to frame their practice in political and economic terms.³²³ But Sithole has asked us to consider another more religio-cultural perspective, and he does this by way of a re-reading or 'revival' of an amaNazaretha sacred text. Sithole queries the English translation of stanza two of Hymn No. 38 (as I have it from Papini and Hexham). Sithole, of course, does not engage this hymn in English. He performs it with other amaNazaretha in isiZulu. He contends that the correct translation of the isiZulu "*Futhi ngongena ngingedwa/ Ethuneni lami*" is not "I too shall go alone/ Into my grave", but "Also, I shall go alone/ into my grave." Sithole argues that "this hymn is about the afterlife and the hardships one is

318 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 4, note 4.

319 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 4.

320 See also Sithole, "Acquiescence or Resistance? The Role of the AIC in the Struggle against Apartheid."

321 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 194.

322 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 198.

323 See the scholarly work cited in this chapter.

likely to encounter on one's journey". "The message put across in Hymn No. 38 is the same as the one in Hymn No. 143, for instance", argues Sithole, "which points to the difficulty of being a Nazaretha and which calls on all who want to join the faith to have religious strength because the Nazaretha way is difficult. According to the speaker in the hymn [and the translation that follows is his], being a Nazaretha is like a slippery rock on which most people cannot manage to walk".³²⁴ The focus is as much on the individual as on the community:

Ukukholwa kwethu
Kulobu buNazaretha
Kuyidwala elibushelelezi
Lehlula abaningi.

Wena uyathanda ukusilandela
Lapha siya khona
Uboqala uthenge isibindi
Lapha siya khona.

Our faith
In this Nazaretha
It's a slippery rock
It beats many people.

If you like to follow us
Where we are going
You must first buy valour.
Where we are going.

But, if I may be allowed the final word/reception, I wonder whether Sithole's reception documents a historical shift from what was primarily a political-economic project, albeit using religio-cultural resources, to a project that is 'essentially' religio-cultural in communal and individual terms? Have the political and economic dimensions of Shembe's restoration of African community been eroded by the more individual-eternal orientation of so much of post-liberation South African Christianity? The land Isaiah Shembe acquired and the community he constructed are no longer on the periphery of South African society. Their land is now enclosed within crowded townships, and both Muller and Gunner comment on how Nelson Mandela and other promi-

324 Sithole, "Sithole Reading West Reading Shembe Reading Judges 11," 4.

nent political leaders have drawn the amaNazaretha into the forefront of post-liberation South Africa.³²⁵

New struggles confront Isaiah Shembe's community, as they do all South Africans, and HIV is among these challenges.³²⁶ Given the centrality of healing among almost every form of African Christianity (including the Church of the Nazarites), and the challenge to healing HIV and AIDS poses, there is considerable inter-religious engagement across Christian denominations (and even across religions). It would be strange, in other words, if theological influences from other forms of African Christianity did not find their way into the theological landscape of the amaNazaretha. For example, in the work of the Ujamaa Centre with the *Siyaphila* support network of people living with HIV and AIDS (discussed more fully in Chapter 7), a young woman from the Nazarite Church was a regular member of a local support group, among women from a whole range of churches, including Settler Initiated Churches ('main-line' churches), African Initiated Churches, and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.³²⁷ Furthermore, there is some evidence that in this 'time of AIDS' women join the Nazarite Church because it is a church that allows (under certain conditions) polygamy, in the hope of "finding a man who would take them as a second or subsequent wife".³²⁸ In so doing, these women may bring other more individualised forms of African Christianity among the amaNazaretha.

Individualised forms of Christian faith are now the norm in South Africa, as they are in most of the African continent.³²⁹ However, that such forms of Christian faith are now the norm is a new phenomenon in South Africa, for we have always had a robustly contested 'Christian' terrain.³³⁰ Does Sithole's

325 Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 23–24; Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God*, 1–4.

326 West, "Male and Female Bodies in the Teaching of Isaiah Shembe: Possible Implications for HIV and AIDS," in *Broken Bodies and Healing Communities: The Challenge of HIV and AIDS in the South African Context* (ed. Richardson; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2009).

327 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word: What People Living with HIV and AIDS Want (and Get) from the Bible," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 (2006).

328 Hunter, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010), 152. I thank Beverley Haddad for bringing this example to my attention.

329 Gifford, "Trajectories in African Christianity," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 4 (2008).

330 Kairos, *Challenge to the Church: The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: The Kairos theologians, 1985); West, "Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem: Religion in the Public Realm between Polokwane and the Presidency," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 23, no. 1&2 (2010).

response to my reception of Shembe's reception of Judges 11 reflect a re-configuration of the political and economic emphasis of Isaiah Shembe's Ibandla lamaNazaretha? Or have we 'outsiders' misunderstood the emphasis of this movement from the outset?

Perhaps, as Richard Horsley has argued concerning what he characterises as the religio-cultural and political-economic "renewal movement" established by Jesus (evident in the material associated with the Q source and Mark's gospels),³³¹ where Jesus is the organic intellectual of the early 'Jesus movement', there is a dual but integral ethic at work within Shembe's project. The primary purpose of Shembe's appropriation of the Bible may be to provide a religio-cultural (but resolutely non-ethnic) ethic that builds community among marginalised Africans. But closely allied to this internal ethic, indeed dependent on it and emanating from it, is an external ethic over against both the religio-cultural and political-economic systems of missionary-colonial-*khohwa* Christianity specifically and settler-colonialism in general.

What is clear is that Shembe seizes and is seized by the Bible. In stealing the Bible from the victorious nation who stole African cattle, forcibly reconfiguring African society in both religio-cultural and political-economic terms, Shembe not only appropriates it for the conquered nation, he also effectively separates the Bible from 'the Pope's' dominant missionary-colonial form of Christianity, allowing for a whole host of appropriations not activated or anticipated by that form, of which his reading of the narrative of Jephthah's daughter is one example.

Though Shembe's parable of "The Liberating Bible" concludes with an admonishing caution: "I ask you [says the lord of Ekuphakameni]: what kind of Bible do you write?,"³³² it is clear from the analysis in this chapter, across a range of biblical genres, that Shembe does 're-write' the biblical text. This, then, is the first moment of Shembe's hermeneutics, a moment in which the Bible is both appropriated and partially reconstituted.

The second moment is of the ability of the Bible to configure Shembe and his community through its own compelling and constituting narrative. What is copied is more than text, it is a sacred narrative with the power to re-construct history and identity. The story of Jephthah's daughter, for example, hovers on the edges of the Christian tradition and yet here it reaches out to 'new' hearer-readers as they take up the Bible in their own languages and find

331 Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Continuum, 1994). For a fuller discussion see West, "Contending for Dignity in the Bible and the Post-Apartheid South African Public Realm," in *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (eds. Claassens and Birch; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

332 Hexham and Oosthuizen, *The Story of Isaiah Shembe*, 228.

their own lines of resonance and so connection with kindred biblical projects of restoration.³³³

The biblical hermeneutical process of mutual reconfiguration that lies at the heart of Shembe's engagement with the Bible shows both the capacity of these stolen texts to shape contemporary African Christian communities and of post-colonial African communities to appropriate a range of 'biblical' resources for religio-cultural and political-economic reconstruction. In the next chapter we turn our attention to an explicitly political-economic appropriation of the Bible.

333 It is not that this story has been ignored in the Jewish and Christian traditions, but it has very little public presence within faith communities. In their excellent analysis of Jephthah's daughter in theology and art over the ages, Cees Houtman and Klaas Spronk examine various engagements with this story from Josephus to today; see Houtman and Spronk, *Jefta's Dochter: Tragiek Van Een Vrouwenleven in Theologie En Kunst* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1999). In her work on this story, from an African American perspective, Valerie Cooper provides a useful survey of recent biblical scholarship, which includes an interpretation and an appropriation that come close to Isaiah Shembe's; see Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," in *Pregnant Passion: Gender, Sex, and Violence in the Bible* (ed. Kirk-Duggan; *Semeia Studies*; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). The interpretation she refers to is that put forward by some biblical scholars, who argue that this is a form of aetiological story, attempting to explain the origin of a female rite of passage practised in Israel. However, she goes on to note that Cheryl Exum has dismissed this interpretation, arguing that there is no evidence for such a ritual, apart from this story; see Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," 184. The appropriation she mentions (in a footnote) is of the women's auxiliary of the Black Masons, the Eastern Stars, who used "to reenact the story of Jephthah's daughter regularly". "Apparently", she continues, "they identified with Bat-Jephthah [a name given to Jephthah's daughter by women scholars] on some level"; see Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," 187, note 6. Comparative analysis between this appropriation and that of Shembe would be instructive. Within contemporary South Africa, apart from Ibandla lamaNazaretha, African feminist scholars have taken up this story as a resource with which to engage gender violence, and some of them worry, having read my work on Shembe, "that the emphasis on the daughter's sacrifice that is held up as an example for other young women to sacrifice themselves for the community is problematic. As Cheryl Exum rightly warns with regard to such an interpretation . . . 'patriarchal ideology here coopts a women's ceremony in order to glorify the victim. The androcentric message of the story . . . is . . . submit to paternal authority. You may have to sacrifice your autonomy; you may lose your life, and even your name, but your sacrifice will be remembered, indeed celebrated for generations to come.'" However, Juliana Claassens, quoted here, does acknowledge that "Isaiah Shembe's application of the Daughter of Jephthah account is complex"; see Claassens, "Female Resistance in Spite of Injustice: Human Dignity and the Daughter of Jephthah," *Old Testament Essays* 26, no. 3 (2013): 611, note 11.

The Contested Bible

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we [Blacks] had the land. The white man said to us, “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we [Blacks] had the Bible.

One of the elders of *Ibandla lamaNazaretha* rebuked me in public, saying “We do not interpret the Bible, the Bible interprets us”. Elizabeth Gunner had asked me to say something about the biblical interpretation of Isaiah Shembe at the launch of her book *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God: Writings From Ibandla lamaNazaretha, A South African Church*.¹ In my short talk I said that Isaiah Shembe was a remarkable ‘re-memberer’ of the Bible, having seized it from those who took African cattle and having forged neo-indigenous interpretations for the restoration of the community he established. The elders of Ibandla lamaNazaretha who were present, participating in the book launch, felt the need to correct me publically. “We do not interpret the Bible”, I was told, “the Bible interprets us”.²

Such is the reverence for the Bible in (South) Africa that such claims are common, especially within African Christianity, with most African church leaders asserting that they are subject to the Bible. But there is a tradition of African Christianity that is overt about the ideological dimensions of biblical interpretation and the ideological dimensions of the Bible itself. In following the Bible into this terrain, we take up another trajectory within neo-indigenous African biblical interpretation, that of the missionary-colonial trained African biblical scholar who has taken up, mastered, the tools of the ‘master’, and turned them against the master’s house. This is the trajectory set in motion by the likes of Moffat’s mission, for “[t]he students, clerics, and artists who comprised the Black Consciousness Movement came from South Africa’s small, black middle class, those privileged enough to spend time at universities

1 Gunner, *The Man of Heaven and the Beautiful Ones of God: Writings from Ibandla lamaNazaretha, a South African Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

2 However, when I was invited to deliver the Ujamaa Centre’s “Inaugural Isaiah Shembe Lecture”, on the 29th July 2015, Rev F.I. Mgidi, in responding to my lecture, insisted that though they use the Bible, they do not consider it an ‘authority’; he made this point as part of a larger claim about the importance of the direct spoken word of God to Isaiah Shembe as the primary source of his ministry rather than the (indirect) written word of God in the Bible.

[and seminaries]³ and to read and reflect on their situation”,⁴ the descendants of previous generations of (largely) missionary educated Africans.

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we [Blacks] had the land. The white man said to us, “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we [Blacks] had the Bible.

This anecdote has been and is told regularly in African contexts. African land and the Bible are integrally related in Africa, with the contours of their relationship following a similar pattern across the continent. The details are different from context to context, and so the anecdote is always accompanied by local commentary. This chapter is a form of commentary on this anecdote, with the commentary coming from the various forms of South African Black Theology that have emerged in the period from the 1970s to the present.

South African theologian Tinyiko Maluleke offers a succinct summary of South African Black Theology’s history:

Though clearly influenced by and initially dependent on North American Black Theology—at least for framing, diagnosing and prophetic language—South African Black Theology arose in a unique local context. It was a context of intensifying Black political and cultural resistance against Apartheid and racial capitalism. In choosing the name Black, South African Black Theology, like the Black Consciousness Movement deliberately and defiantly chose a pejorative term with the express aim of redefining it and pumping it with positive meaning.

With a clear and deliberate race bias for Blacks and their condition under Apartheid’s racial capitalism, Black Theology has seldom meant to be more than Christian theology—only a Christian theology of liberation. Nevertheless, its scathing and unmistakable critique notwithstanding, South African Black Theology is essentially an apologia for the Christian religion and for Christian theology. The anecdote quoted above captures

3 Denis and Duncan, *The Native School That Caused All the Trouble: A History of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011); de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 148.

4 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Athens and Johannesburg: Ohio University Press, 2010), 6, 21–25; de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 145.

something of the problem as diagnosed by Black Theology. It is the paradox of a severely subjugated people who have nevertheless taken to the religion of their oppressors rather enthusiastically. Even the process of decolonization—where and when it has occurred—has not reduced the apparent Black adherence to the Christian religion. The ‘Bible’ in the anecdote must therefore not be taken literally but as a symbol of the entire package of which the Christian religion—as transmitted mainly by the West to Africa in the past three centuries (including the current one)—consists. Built into the anecdote is the suspicion that there might be a logical and coherent connection between Black poverty (material and spiritual) and Black adherence to Christianity. Equally taken for granted here is the ‘foreignness’ of Christianity to Black people. However, the suspicion of possible connections between Black adherence to the Christian religion and Black ‘poverty’ not only in South Africa but also on the continent is not the monopoly of Black Theology. Almost all African Christian theologies have expressed the same suspicion—albeit in different ways. However, it is true that the suspicion has been ‘experienced’ most acutely and expressed most eloquently in South African Black Theology.⁵

But what if we do take ‘the Bible’ literally, not in an analysis of the anecdote but in analysis of Black Theology? This is the focus of this chapter. Others have told the story of South African Black Theology along different organising trajectories; for example, as a Third World theology,⁶ as one among a number of ‘Black’ theologies in the African diaspora,⁷ as a dialogue partner with African inculturation theology,⁸ as a sibling of Black Theology in the USA,⁹ as a form of

5 Maluleke, “Black Theology as Public Discourse,” in *Constructing a Language of Religion in Public Life: Multi-Event 1999 Academic Workshop Papers* (ed. Cochrane; Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1998).

6 See for example Appiah-Kobi and Torres eds, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

7 See for example Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

8 See for example Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

9 See for example Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

missiological theology,¹⁰ as a constituent of the struggle of the South African church against apartheid,¹¹ as a particular kind of (Marxist) liberation theology,¹² as part of an African cultural renaissance,¹³ as a core component of the intellectual history and formation of Black Consciousness in South Africa,¹⁴ and as the distinctive embodied theologies of particular South African Black theologians.

Whatever the story they tell, each of these accounts of South African Black Theology recognises the Bible as a core element in the Black Theology project. Daniel Magaziner, for example, begins his book on Black Consciousness in South Africa with the story of nine black South African activists who were put on trial for terrorism in 1974.¹⁵ “The trial stretched on for over seventeen months”, Magaziner recounts, and “[a]long the way, the defendants, the state prosecutor, the judge, and other witnesses paused on numerous occasions to debate the character and political opinions of Jesus Christ”.¹⁶

The discussions revolved especially around a resolution SASO [South African Students' Organisation] . . . had passed in 1973, which described Christ as “the first freedom fighter to die for the liberation of the oppressed.” The resolution went on to detail how Christ had earned his reputation by associating with known Zealots, described as the anticolonial revolutionary radicals of first-century Palestine, and perhaps even the Essenes, described as an “Israeli guerilla warfare unit against the Romans.” The judge asked witnesses to explain what this meant. Some demurred; others, perhaps recognizing that they were going to jail anyway, drew comparisons between the Essenes and the Front for Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), whose guerilla forces had just taken power in neighbouring Mozambique. Discussions about these and other theological issues went on and on, to the point that the state prosecutor, faced with defendants who repeatedly referred to the Bible and Christ to make their case, grew frustrated. “SASO and BPC [the Black People's Convention]

10 See for example Kritzinger, “Black Theology: Challenge to Mission” (PhD, University of South Africa, 1988).

11 See for example de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 144–183.

12 See for example Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988).

13 See for example Gibellini ed, *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

14 See for example Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*.

15 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 1.

16 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 1.

are very fond of bringing religious connotations into lots of things,” he finally complained. He had a point. These young activists appeared to have drawn rather interesting conclusions about the theory and practice of resistance to apartheid, based not exclusively on politics or ideology but on theology.

Consider the plea penned by Kaborane Gilbert Sedibe, the Student Representative Council (SRC) president from the University of the North, in preparation for the trial. Sedibe explained that the charges against him were “an evil indictment . . . an indictment against God for having created me black . . . [and] an indictment against Christ for having said that I am a free man.” . . . Sedibe then used the Bible to rebut the charges: “God says to us in Galatians 5:1 that we must stand strong in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage. For declaring this liberty I am being charged. This should not surprise us for the word tells us in 11 Corinthians 2:14 that ‘And do not marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.’” . . . Sedibe’s plea was a profound political statement in a country that disparaged those with darker skins and claimed that God’s countenance shone especially on the descendants of white settlers. It was also a theological statement. Sedibe was a Christian; he knew his Bible and did not enlist the word of God without reflection.¹⁷

Though the framing of Sedibe’s theological argument participates in the warfare images he may well of inherited from missionary Christianity, the core of his claim is about dignity, is about being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Continuing his analysis of Sedibe’s defiance, Magaziner asserts that Sedibe “began from a simple premise: he and his fellow accused were ‘advocates for the dignity of the Black man as created in the image of God.’ . . . Black Consciousness, Sedibe indicated, was not just a resistance ideology; it was about ‘dignity’—about the essential wholeness of a singular being who knew herself (or, in his language, himself)¹⁸ as ‘Black’.”¹⁹ What Sedibe and his comrades were being accused of was “a crime altogether more fundamental than fomenting rebellion against the apartheid state. They had had the temer-

17 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 1–2. This is just one of the many primary texts/stories that Magaziner has returned to us through his careful research.

18 Magaziner’s analysis is throughout “sensitive to the deeply gendered nature of the decade’s thought”; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 7.

19 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 2–3.

ity to claim the existence of dignified black selves in South Africa, who were, in spite of apartheid's ideological premises, the very 'image of God'²⁰—a claim derived from and affirmed by the Word of God, the Bible.

Magaziner goes on to argue, echoing Maluleke,²¹ that "for [black] South Africans Christianity was an essential and intrinsic tool".²² But while Magaziner regularly locates the Bible within South African Black Consciousness and Black Theology, like so many other social scientists he does not distinguish the Bible from Christianity. And while Magaziner offers us a careful and detailed account "that emphasizes process, not politics",²³ the processes through which South African Black Theology works with the Bible are not within the ambit of his study. But such processes are pivotal to this chapter. The emphasis in this chapter is not that Black Theology engaged with the Bible, but how Black Theology engaged with the Bible.

In his study of the Ngwato kingdom (mentioned in the previous chapter), Paul Landau points out that, "Missionaries wished to control the meaning of being a Christian without having to articulate its built-in contradictions". Yet, he continues, "the Ngwato king harnessed this feature of Christianity [ie. "its build-in contradictions"] and expanded the kingdom through it".²⁴ Similarly, the first generation of South African Black theologians harnessed the contradictions between (their own Black understanding of) the 'Gospel' and the Christianity of the 'White' Christian apartheid state. "In protest against government policy and action in the name of Christianity", John and Steve de Gruchy record, "a small group of black ministers staged a march in Johannesburg in 1977. They were arrested and charged in the Magistrates Court with breaking the law".²⁵ And the following is the statement they made in court:

The Honourable Minister of Police and Prisons, Mr. Jimmy Kruger, has stated that people who do not accept the concept and policy of APARTHEID can say so without fear of being PROSECUTED, harassed and intimidated. It is on the strength of his words and of the truth of the

20 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 3, 112. See also de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 147.

21 Rather strangely, Magaziner does not refer to the extensive work of Maluleke at all.

22 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 10.

23 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 5.

24 Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), xvi–xvii. Landau's book is a study of how this was done and what was produced through this harnessing of the inherent contradictions in the missionary message.

25 de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 174.

Gospel of Jesus that we stage this PROTEST MARCH as testimony of our non-acceptance of APARTHEID and its attendant evil effects. This march registers our TOTAL AND ABSOLUTE REJECTION of the Bantustan Apartheid Policy. We want to say that this policy is responsible for a great deal of unhappiness in our country: Detentions without trial, Banning orders, the unjust enforcement of Bantu Education, mass removals, job reservation, muzzling of the Black Press, a disproportionate and disastrous military budget, etc. . . .

In the face of these injustices perpetrated by the White Christian Government, we have great difficulty as Ministers of Religion in explaining the Gospel to our Black people.

The White people came here and told us they were bringing a Gospel of brotherhood. But they will neither live in the same areas as us, nor sit in the same coach in a train.

They told us that they believed "you must love your brother as yourself", but they will allow us none of the things they wish for themselves, no equal opportunity in work, no say in Government, no free movement.

They told us their Gospel was one of sharing, yet they have taken more than three quarters of the whole land for a small minority, and force us to work so that they always gain ten times as much as us.

They told us that Christian life was based on the family, yet there are a million of our men working with them not allowed to have their families where they work, driving our people to sin.

They told us Christianity brought the light of civilised culture, yet they oblige our children to a form of Education that is narrowed and impedes their access to the education and culture of the world.

They told us the Grace of Christ made the human person priority No. 1, yet in a country full of wealth they leave hundreds of thousands out of work and with no unemployment benefit, their children starving.

They told us it was a Gospel of kindness, yet they push us so far from our work that parents are fourteen to sixteen hours away from home and do not see their children awake between Monday and Saturday.

They told us that Christ has broken down all barriers between peoples, yet their Christian Government is forcing us who have worked together for a hundred years and more to become separate nations.

They told us “truth would set us free”, yet when we try to speak the truth of all this as we see it, our spokesmen are detained or banned, our free associations crushed, quotation of our leaders forbidden.

The result of this is that our voices sound hollow when we preach this Gospel in Church. We implore the White Christian Government to examine its Conscience and heed the voice of the Gospel.²⁶

These Black ministers contend with the White Christian Government’s interpretation of “the Gospel”. The Black ministers take their stand on “the Gospel”, pointing to the contradictions between this ‘Gospel’ and its interpretation and implementation by the White Christian Government. There is a singular sense here with respect to ‘the Gospel’, the assumption being that ‘the Gospel’ has a coherent mono-vocal message. In this respect these Black ministers shared the same presupposition as the white Afrikaner ministers who based their justification of apartheid in the 1940s on the Bible.²⁷ Indeed, these Black ministers stand within a similar missionary-colonial theological tradition to that of their white Afrikaner ‘brothers’.²⁸

Isaiah Shembe, as we have seen, broke with the missionary-colonial-*kholwa* theological tradition, though he too used the Bible as a singular authoritative voice both to speak to his congregation and to speak back to missionary-colonial-*kholwa* constellations of power. A distinctive difference with the second generation (or phase) of South African Black theologians is that they located the central contradiction within the Bible itself. But before we come to an in-depth analysis of this second phase within South African Black Theology, we must consider what biblical hermeneutics they inherited from the first phase.

26 de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 174–175. The use of upper and lower case is reproduced here as it is in the original.

27 Vosloo, “The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid in Reformed Circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Remarks,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015). See also Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 60, 67, 104, de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 71–74.

28 de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 161.

The Trustworthy Bible: The Book of Hope

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.

Desmond Tutu has told this anecdote regularly.²⁹ On some of these occasions he has added, "And we got the better deal!" This humorous tag commentary on the anecdote is typical of an interpretive orientation towards the Bible characterised by trust, an orientation that characterises much of the first phase of South African Black Theology, and in particular the biblical hermeneutics of Black theologians like Tutu and Allan Boesak. Their ideological orientation towards the Bible is one of trust. A hermeneutics of trust is evident in a number of respects. First, as in much of African Theology (and African American Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology), the Bible is considered to be a primary source of Black Theology.³⁰ The Bible belongs to Black Theology in the sense that doing theology without it is inconceivable. Second, the Bible is perceived to be primarily on the side of the Black struggle for liberation and life and against apartheid. The Bible belongs to Black Theology in the sense that the struggle for liberation and life is central to them both.³¹

While there is definitely an awareness within this first phase of South African Black Theology that there are different, sometimes complementing and sometimes contradicting, theologies in the Bible, this is understood as evidence of the thoroughly contextual nature of the Bible. But because the pervasive theological trajectory is perceived to be one of liberation, the plurality of theologies in the Bible is unproblematic. Those who use the Bible against Black South Africans are therefore misinterpreting the Bible, because the Bible is basically on the side of Black Theology's liberatory project, whether the religio-cultural component or the political-economic component.³²

In terms of interpretive methodology, the dominant dimensions of the biblical text among Black theologians who work within a framework of a hermeneutics of trust can be characterised as a combination of a focus on the literary

29 Gish, *Desmond Tutu: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 101.

30 Mbiti, "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," in *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, Accra, December 1977* (eds. Appiah-Kubi and Torres; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1977).

31 Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1983), 124–129.

32 See Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 56; de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 151, 154–160, 163–164, 170–171, 174–175, 179.

dimensions of the biblical text together with a focus on the central symbolic and thematic semantic axis (or trajectory) of the final canonical form of the Bible.³³ A relatively careful and close reading of particular biblical texts is used in conjunction with a generally accepted sense of the liberatory shape of the final Christian canonical form, culminating as it does in Jesus, “the ultimate reference point”.³⁴

Although race may not be an obvious dimension of biblical texts—and South African Black Theology has not shared the same predilection as Black Theology in the USA for recovering an African presence in the Bible or of bringing racial analysis to bear on the Bible itself³⁵—Tutu, Boesak and other Black theologians found numerous lines of connection between the South African racial struggle and the struggle of God’s people in the pages of the Bible. Boesak, for example, interprets the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 as a story about racial conflict, and God’s call for black and white to be ‘brothers’.³⁶ Even Takatso Mofokeng, who fits more comfortably into the next phase of Black Theology, makes the claim that,

when many Black Christians read their history of struggle carefully, they come upon many Black heroes and heroines who were inspired and sustained by some passages and stories of the Bible in their struggle, when they read and interpreted them in the light of their Black experience, history and culture. They could consequently resist dehumanization and the destruction of their faith in God the liberator. It is this noble

33 Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987); West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Maryknoll and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995), 131–173.

34 Tutu, *Hope and Suffering*, 106.

35 Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, Family* (New York: Orbis, 1989); Felder ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Bailey, “Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives,” in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Bailey, “Academic Biblical Interpretation among African Americans in the United States,” in *African Americans and the Bible* (ed. Wimbush; New York and London: Continuum, 2000); Bailey ed., *Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation (Semeia Studies)* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: Christian University Press, 1998).

36 Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 157.

Black Christian history that helps to bring out the other side of the Bible, namely, the nature of the Bible as a book of hope for the downtrodden.³⁷

The Ideological Bible: The Oppressive Voices of the Bible

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we [Blacks] had the land. The white man said to us, "Let us pray". After the prayer, the white man had the land and we [Blacks] had the Bible.

The quotation from Mofokeng makes it clear that there is another "side of the Bible", a side that does not represent hope for Black South Africans. In a direct response to the anecdote already recounted above about Bibles, white men and African land, he asserts that this story expresses more precisely than any statement in the history of political science or Christian missions the ambiguity of the Bible and "the dilemma that confronts black South Africans in their relationships with the Bible".

With this statement, which is known by young and old in South Africa, Black people of South Africa point to three dialectically related realities. They show the central position which the Bible occupies in the ongoing process of colonization, national oppression and exploitation. They also confess the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they express a historic commitment that is accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to another—a commitment to terminate exploitation of humans by other humans.³⁸

That the Bible is both a problem and a solution is at the centre of Mofokeng's analysis. His ideological orientation is one of suspicion towards the Bible. While the "external" problem of the misuse of the Bible by oppressive and reactionary white South African Christians remains a concern, Mofokeng identifies a more fundamental problem—the "internal" problem of the Bible itself. Mofokeng is critical of those who concentrate only on the external problem, those who accuse "oppressor-preachers of *misusing* the Bible for their oppres-

37 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," *Journal of Black Theology* 2 (1988): 38. See also Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 9–11, 171.

38 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 34.

sive purposes and objectives" and "preachers and racist whites of not practising what they preach". It is clear, Mofokeng continues, that these responses are "based on the assumption that the Bible is essentially a book of liberation". While Mofokeng concedes that these responses have a certain amount of validity to them, the crucial point he wants to make is that there are numerous "texts, stories and traditions in the Bible which lend themselves to only oppressive interpretations and oppressive uses because of their inherent oppressive nature". What is more, he insists, any attempt "to 'save' or 'co-opt' these oppressive texts for the oppressed only serve the interests of the oppressors".³⁹

Some have recognised this reality, he points out, particularly young Blacks, who "have categorically identified the Bible as an oppressive document by its very nature and to its very core", and who have therefore gone on to suggest that the best option "is to disavow the Christian faith and consequently be rid of the obnoxious Bible". Indeed, he continues, some of these young people "have zealously campaigned for its expulsion from the oppressed Black community".⁴⁰

However, Mofokeng goes on to lament that this abandonment of the Bible is not widespread within the black community. The reason for the retention of the Bible by the Black majority is, he argues (writing in the mid-1980s),

largely due to the fact that no easily accessible ideological silo or storeroom is being offered to the social classes of our people that are desperately in need of liberation. African traditional religions are too far behind most Blacks while Marxism, is to my mind, far ahead of many Blacks, especially adult people. In the absence of a better storeroom of ideological and spiritual food, the Christian religion and the Bible will continue for an undeterminable period of time to be the haven of the Black masses par excellence.⁴¹

Given this situation of very limited ideological options, Mofokeng accepts that Black theologians "who are committed to the struggle for liberation and are organically connected to the struggling Christian people" have to engage this reality, and so must "do their best to shape the Bible into a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed instead of leaving it to confuse, frustrate or even destroy our people".⁴² Mofokeng does not say much about how Black theologians take up this task. But the methodological contours of the task are

39 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 37–38.

40 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 40.

41 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 40.

42 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 40. See the analysis by Jobling, "Very Limited Ideological Options': Marxism and Biblical Studies in Postcolonial Scenes,"

the central contribution of the work of Itumeleng Mosala, whose work gives a clear shape to the second phase of South African Black Theology.

Mosala's basic critique is directed at the exegetical-interpretive starting point of the first phase of Black Theology, particularly as this starting point is expressed in the biblical hermeneutics of Boesak and Tutu. In Mosala's analysis the problem is that their exegesis begins with "the notion that the Bible is the revealed 'Word of God'".⁴³ He traces this view of the Bible as "an absolute, non-ideological 'Word of God'" back to the work of the African American theologian James Cone. He finds it even in the work of the "most theoretically astute of [African American] black theologians", Cornel West. Whatever the origin, what matters to Mosala is that "South African black theologians are not free from enslavement to this neo-orthodox theological problematic that regards the notion of the 'Word of God' as a hermeneutical starting point".⁴⁴ Mosala underlines the pervasiveness of this view of the Bible in first phase Black Theology by subjecting Tutu, Boesak, as well as other South African theologians, like Sigqibo Dwane, Simon Gqubule, Khoza Mgojo, and Manas Buthelezi, to a similar critique.⁴⁵

Mosala contends specifically with Cornel West, James Cone, Allan Boesak, and Desmond Tutu concerning their interpretive insistence "that it is a biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation".⁴⁶ "This is true as far as it goes", Mosala continues,

but, as any hermeneutics deriving from the crucible of class struggle will attest, the biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed is only one of the biblical truths. The other truth is that the struggle between Yahweh and Baal is not simply an ideological warfare taking place in the minds

in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, (eds Moore and Segovia; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

43 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 15.

44 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 17. See also West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 122–123; Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 165.

45 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 17–42. More recently, Tinyiko Maluleke has extended this critique to African theologians north of the Limpopo river, including Lamin Sanneh, Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti, Byang Kato, and Jesse Mugambi; see Maluleke, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from Our Own Wells," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 96 (1996): 10–14. Elelwani Farisani offers a similar critique of Mugambi and others; see Farisani, "The Ideologically Biased Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction," *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 2 (2002).

46 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 16.

and hearts of believers but a struggle between the God of Israelite landless peasants and subdued slaves and the God of Israelite royal, noble, landlord, and priestly classes. In other words, the Bible is rent apart by the antagonistic struggles of the warring classes of Israelite society in much the same way that our world is torn asunder by society's class, cultural, racial, and gender divisions.⁴⁷

Mosala argues that the Bible offers no unequivocal 'message' of God and consequently cannot be the fundamental criterion in theology. What worries Mosala is the 'immense import' of Black Theology's appropriation of the notion 'Word of God'; "because presumably the Word of God cannot (by definition) be the object of criticism. Furthermore, the Word of God cannot be critiqued in the light of the black experience or any other experience. The only appropriate response is obedience. At best, the black experience can be seen in the light of the Word of God but not vice versa".⁴⁸ For example, he asks,

Does the definition of the Bible as the Word of God, therefore, mean that even the 'law and order' God of David and Solomon cannot be the object of criticism in the light of the black experience? Does it mean that the black struggle cannot be hermeneutically connected with the struggles of the oppressed and exploited Israelites against the economic and political domination of the Israelite monarchical state, which was undergirded by the ideology of the Davidic-Zionist covenant (11 Sam. 7)? Does it mean that no hermeneutical affinity can be established between working-class blacks and landless peasants, exploited workers, and destitute underclasses that made up the followers of Jesus? One cannot select one part of the 'Word of God' and neglect others.⁴⁹

"The insistence on the Bible as the Word of God must be seen for what it is", argues Mosala: "an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests evident in the Bible are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions. In this way the Bible becomes an ahistorical, interclassist document".⁵⁰ So Mosala's contention is that most of the Bible "offers no certain starting point for a theology of liberation within itself". For example, he argues that the biblical book of Micah "is eloquent in its silence about the ideological struggle waged by the oppressed and exploited class of

47 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 16.

48 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 16–17.

49 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 17.

50 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 18.

monarchic Israel". In other words, "it is a ruling class document and represents the ideological and political interests of the ruling class". As such there "is simply too much de-ideologization to be made before it can be hermeneutically straightforward in terms of the struggle for liberation".⁵¹ The Bible, therefore, cannot be the hermeneutical starting point of Black Theology. Rather, those committed to the struggles of the Black oppressed and exploited people "cannot ignore the history, culture, and ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point".⁵²

However, this does not mean that Mosala totally rejects the Bible. While the Bible cannot be the primary starting point for Black theology, Mosala concedes "there are enough contradictions within the book [of Micah, for example] to enable eyes that are hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kin struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absences of those struggles in the text". The contradictions are present (in a poststructuralist sense) within the text because the Bible is itself "a product and a record of class struggles";⁵³ and Black theologians, because of their social location in contemporary class struggles, are able to detect "glimpses of liberation and of a determinate social movement galvanized by a powerful religious ideology in the biblical text".⁵⁴ The "existence of this phenomenon is not in question", Mosala acknowledges; what is at issue is the capacity of first phase Black Theology to develop "an adequate hermeneutical framework that can rescue those liberating themes from the biblical text". And he insists, "One cannot successfully perform this task by denying the oppressive structures that frame what liberating themes the texts encode".⁵⁵

Mosala goes on in his work to provide a methodological framework that has the capacity to undertake this 'de-ideologising' hermeneutical project. At the outset, Mosala insists, there must be a dialectical relationship between an appropriation of Black culture and experience and an appropriation of the Bible.⁵⁶ Black Theology, he argues, only "has roots in the Bible insofar as it is capable of linking the struggles of oppressed people in South Africa today with

51 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 120–121.

52 Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology* (eds. Mosala and Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 197.

53 Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," 196.

54 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 40.

55 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 40.

56 Mosala, "Ethics of the Economic Principles: Church and Secular Investments," in *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Mpilo Desmond Tutu* (eds. Tlhagale and Mosala; Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 119.

the struggles of oppressed people in the communities of the Bible". But this is precisely where the problem lies, for, he goes on to argue, the oppressed people in the Bible "did not write the Bible" and their struggles "come to us *via* the struggles of their oppressors". So while the first phase of Black Theology might be "firmly" rooted in the Bible, it is not, he argues, "critically" rooted in the Bible.⁵⁷

This is the fundamental problem of first phase Black Theology for Mosala. Mosala contends that the impotence of Black Theology as a weapon of struggle comes from the enslavement of Black Theology "to the biblical hermeneutics of dominant ideologies".⁵⁸ More specifically, Black Theology's impotence comes from embracing "the ideological form of the text"—the final canonical form, which Mosala characterises as "the oppressors most dangerous form".⁵⁹ Existential commitment to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, insists Mosala, was no substitute "for [social-]scientific analysis of the valence of a tradition in the class struggle".⁶⁰ While Mosala acknowledges that biblical "texts that are against oppressed people may be coopted by the interlocutors of the liberation struggle", he insists that "the fact that these texts have their ideological roots in oppressive practices means that the texts are capable of undergirding the interests of the oppressors even when used by the oppressed. In other words, oppressive texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts".⁶¹

Mosala rejects a "fundamentalism of the Left",⁶² that "attempts to transplant biblical paradigms and situations into our world without understanding their historical circumstances".⁶³ Citing the work of Norman Gottwald, a pioneer in Marxist ideological interpretation of the Bible, Mosala criticises liberation theologians who invoke biblical symbols of liberation but who "seldom push those biblical symbols all the way back to their socio-historic foundations" and consequently are not able to "grasp concretely the inner-biblical strands of oppression and liberation in all their stark multiplicity and contradictory interactions". Not only does this "picking and choosing" of biblical resources by some liberation theologians "not carry sufficient structural analysis of biblical societies to make a proper comparison with the present possible", a lack of interest in and knowledge of "the history of social forms and ideas from

57 Mosala, "Ethics of the Economic Principles: Church and Secular Investments," 120.

58 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 4.

59 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 28.

60 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 34.

61 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 30.

62 Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 104.

63 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 31.

biblical times to the present” results in the risk that “unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present”.⁶⁴ It is “a risky business”, says Gottwald, “to ‘summon up’ powerful symbolism out of a distant past unless the symbol users are very selfconscious of their choices and applications, and fully aware of how their social struggle is both like and unlike the social struggle of the architects of the symbols”.⁶⁵ Efforts to draw “religious inspiration” or “biblical values” from, for example, early Israel, Gottwald elaborates, “will be romantic and utopian unless resolutely correlated to both the ancient and the contemporary cultural-material and social-organizational foundations”.⁶⁶

Mosala agrees with Gottwald; he is worried by “a thinness of social structural analysis and a thinness of biblical analysis” in first phase Black Theology.⁶⁷ His fundamental objections against the biblical hermeneutics of first phase Black Theology are that not only does it suffer from an unstructural understanding of the Bible, but, both as a consequence and as a reason, it also suffers from an unstructural understanding of Black experience and struggle. Central to Mosala’s hermeneutics of liberation is the search for a theoretical perspective that can locate both the Bible and the Black experience within appropriate socio-historical contexts. While Mosala acknowledges that “even a semiological [semiotic] approach to texts” can discern the contestation that has produced a particular biblical text,⁶⁸ he does not elaborate on this methodological contribution. He mentions semiotic methods because he wants to make the point that there is no excuse for first phase Black Theology. He insists that even those who do not use the socio-historical materialist interpretive methodologies he is advocating ought to be able to recognise, ‘to see’, the contestation taking place within the literary-semiotic form of the text that is the canonical text.

But in terms of his preferred methods, Mosala uses a two-step methodology. First, he uses historical-critical tools (to identify and delimit the ‘sources’ that underlie the final canonical form of the text and then to historically locate these source texts within a particular time and place). Second, and most

64 Gottwald, cited in Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 31–32.

65 Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BC* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), 703. Gottwald gives considerable space to developing this point (703–706). See also Bailey, “The Danger of Ignoring One’s Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text,” in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 74.

66 Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 706.

67 Gottwald, cited in Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 31.

68 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41.

importantly, he then uses sociological resources (especially Marxist historical-materialist forms of analysis) to reconstruct the particular 'class' struggles within this historical context, locating each source layer within a particular social sector. Historical-materialism, particularly its appropriation of 'struggle' as a key concept, provides the categories and concepts necessary to read and critically appropriate *both* Black history and culture and the Bible. "The category of struggle", says Mosala, "becomes an important hermeneutical factor not only in one's reading of his or her history and culture but also in one's understanding of the history, nature, ideology, and agenda of the biblical texts".⁶⁹ By not using socio-historical modes of interpretation, first phase Black Theology continues to spar "with the ghost of the oppressor" in its most powerful form—the final ideological form of the text.⁷⁰

Mosala confronts his fellow Black theologians with what was then, in the 1980s, an emerging sociological orientation within biblical scholarship.⁷¹ Black theologians tended to read the Bible drawing only on theological resources, neglecting both biblical and ideological criticism. The reason the Bible cannot be read "as a bill of rights" in the service of the Black masses, Mosala insists, "pertains to the very nature of the Bible itself".

A century of historical-critical scholarship has demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Bible is made up of a multiplicity of varying and often contradictory traditions that are a function of both a long history over which they have been produced and a variety of situations that produced them. Recent sociological and materialist exegeses of biblical texts have added to this understanding the role of contradictory and conflicting social and political interests, even within the same time frame or society, in the production of the Bible. Thus, while many texts of the Bible clearly represent human rights values, there are surely many others that emanate from the biblical counterparts of our contemporary oppressors and violators of such human rights.⁷²

It is the over-determinative theological reading of the Bible "as an innocent and transparent container of a message or messages that has caused black and liberation theologians not to be aware of—or, more correctly, to appropriate

69 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 9.

70 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 28.

71 Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*; Gottwald and Horsley eds, *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983).

72 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 29.

as otherwise—the presence and significance of oppression and oppressors, exploitation and exploiters in the *signified practices* that the biblical texts really are”.⁷³ But the Bible cannot, he insists, “be reduced to a simple socially and ideologically unmediated ‘Word of God’. Nor can it be seen merely as a straight forward mirror of events in Ancient Israel. On the contrary it is a *production*, a remaking of those events and processes”.⁷⁴ Using the language of redaction criticism, Mosala works with a form of social-systemic analysis in which the different textual-source ‘layers’ historical-critical work detects within the biblical text each have a particular ideological ‘voice’. Working from the final form of the text, the ‘top’ layer, Mosala identifies this as the voice and interests of the ruling classes. The layer beneath this, which has been co-opted by the final form of the text, represents the voice and interests of the professional classes, who though relatively autonomous, operate in support of the ruling classes. The next textual layer represents the voice and interests of mediating class sectors, such as the prophets, who locate themselves between the ruling classes and the under-classes, but who still take the ruling classes as their reference point. Their voices too have been co-opted, by both the professional classes and the ruling classes. Finally, and mostly in a fragmentary form because of the multiple layers of co-option, there is a layer representing the voices and interests of the under-classes.⁷⁵

A critical and structural-systemic analysis of the biblical text requires, Mosala argues, that Black Theology identify the ideological reference code or voice in which a particular text is encoded. For it is only by recognizing the particular ideological layer/encoding/voice of a text that an interpreter can prevent herself or himself from colluding with the dominant and hegemonic. Moreover, it is only by recognising the particular layer/encoding/voice of a text that the interpreter can then interpret the text ‘against the grain’, recognising the prevailing voice and then deciding whether to read ‘with’ this voice or to read ‘against’ this voice. A critical and structural ideological mode of reading “advocates an analytic approach to the text of the Bible that exposes the underlying literary and ideological plurality in the text without denying the hegemonic totality or shall we say unity of the final product”.⁷⁶

The phrase ‘against the grain’, which Mosala borrows from Terry Eagleton, reminds us, Mosala argues, “that the appropriation of works and events is always a contradictory process embodying in some form a ‘struggle’”. The Bible

73 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41.

74 Mosala, “Black Theology,” (Unpublished paper, 1989), 3.

75 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41–42.

76 Mosala, “Black Theology,” 4.

is itself a site of struggle, and so the related Black interpretive struggle consists of, depending on the class forces involved, “either to harmonize the contradictions inherent in the works and events or to highlight them with a view to allowing social class choices in their appropriation”.⁷⁷ The concern of Mosala is not that Black theologians *cannot* read any text, no matter what its encoding, against the grain, but that they *ought not* to do this without *recognising* what they are doing. If they are not overt about identifying the “reference code” of a particular text, they risk “colluding with it”.⁷⁸

The Bible for the second phase of Black Theology “is the product, the record, the site, and the weapon of class, cultural, gender, and racial struggles”. Furthermore, continues Mosala, “a biblical hermeneutics of liberation that does not take this fact seriously can only falter in its project to emancipate the poor and the exploited of the world”. “Once more”, concludes Mosala, and this is the final sentence in his book, “the simple truth rings out that the poor and exploited must liberate the Bible so that the Bible may liberate them”.⁷⁹

This invocation of “the poor and exploited” is important, and we will return to it via Mosala’s commentary on the anecdote that frames my chapter. “The task of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation”, says Mosala, “is to go behind the dominant discourses to the discourses of oppressed communities in order to link up with kindred struggles”.⁸⁰ Introducing our anecdote, Mosala writes, “In South Africa a common mythological expression of the role of biblical discourses in the dispossession of blacks runs like this”:

When the white man came to our country, he had a Bible and we had the land. The white man said to the black man, “Let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and the black man had the Bible.⁸¹

“The task now facing a black theology of liberation”, Mosala continues, “is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible”. But, insists Mosala, “[i]n order for this to

77 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

78 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41. The work of Elelwani Farisani on African notions of ‘reconstruction’ is a good example of this predicament; see Farisani, “The Ideologically Biased Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction; Farisani, “The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 116 (2003); Farisani, “The Third Return of the Babylonian Exiles to Palestine,” *Old Testament Essays* 19, no. 3 (2006).

79 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 193.

80 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 153.

81 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 153.

happen, black theology must employ the progressive aspects of black history and culture to liberate the Bible so that the Bible may liberate black people. That is the hermeneutical dialectic".⁸² In sum, it is only a *critical* appropriation of the Bible along socio-historical and ideologically African socialist lines,⁸³ systematically and critically (re)located in the broad Black working-class struggle, that will enable the Bible to be a resource with which Black Theology will be to "get the land back and get the land back without losing the Bible".⁸⁴

Here Mosala offers his own 'take' on the anecdote that frames this chapter. Mosala does not envisage a Bible-less African Christianity. He is clear that interpreting the Bible is part of the African struggle for land,⁸⁵ and so the task of interpretation must be undertaken using a hermeneutic of suspicion with respect to the various compositional 'source' texts that constitute the Bible. The final canonical form of the Bible is not ideologically innocent, and using it uncritically will not enable Africans to re-appropriate their land, which is why Mosala's emphasis is on interpretive method. Without an appropriate method, African Christianities in general and Black Theology in particular are susceptible to the ideology of the final form of the biblical text and so to the ruling class ideologies that control and coopt 'other' ideologies.

For Mosala there is a need for both an analogy of struggle—discerning potentially useful resonances between South African sites of struggle and sites of struggle within and behind the biblical text—and an analogy of method—deploying related critical interpretive tools in order to analyse both South African sites of struggle and sites of struggle in contexts of the Bible's production. While first phase Black Theology focuses on the former, second phase Black Theology, Mosala insists, must focus on both, emphasising the latter,

82 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 153.

83 See the discussion on African uses of Marxist theory, including the work of Mosala, in Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*.

84 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 153.

85 Alistair Kee picks up on Mosala's undeveloped distinction between "the black working class" and "the black peasantry" (Mosala, 1989: 21), arguing this distinction is crucial for South African Black Theology's task after liberation, because, says Kee, they live in different worlds, "characterised in turn by capitalism and feudalism". According to Kee, "The end of apartheid has been irrelevant to this fundamental division", a fundamental division that can only be addressed by dealing with "the question of land"; Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, 94–95. Kee goes on in the pages following (95–97) to make a number of condescending statements about the task of (urban) Black Theology with respect to "the black peasantry", saying that "urban blacks" must "liberate them" and "redeem them"; Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, 96.

for it is the latter that provides the necessary structural-systemic capacity to the former.⁸⁶

The Black Bible: What it Means 'to have' the Bible

Both Takatso Mofokeng and Itumeleng Mosala, the pioneers of the second phase of South African Black Theology, acknowledge the Bible's presence among ordinary South Africans. Mofokeng would prefer that the Black masses used Marxist ideological resources in their struggles, and celebrates those who have rejected the Bible as a weapon of choice. But he recognises too that those Black Christians who have retained the Bible have forged their own hermeneutic strategies, using "some passages and stories of the Bible in their struggle", but interpreting them "in the light of their Black experience, history and culture".⁸⁷ Mosala is a little more specific about how ordinary Black Christians work with the Bible, saying that ideological naivete of most Black theologians has been "surpassed by the largely illiterate black working class and poor peasantry who have defied the canon of Scripture, with its ruling class ideological basis, by appropriating the Bible in their own way using the cultural tools emerging out of their struggle for survival".⁸⁸

Recognising the "middle-class origins and character of the early black political discourses", Mosala draws on the work of Amilcar Cabral in order to argue for "a spiritual reconversion", a "re-Africanization" that is forged "during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the mass of the people and the communion of sacrifices which the struggle demands".⁸⁹ And while "[t]he post-1910 political and cultural discourses of the Black struggle", Mosala reflects, "especially as represented by the ANC, the PAC, the BCM, and, most recently, the United Democratic Front and the Azanian People's Organization", demonstrate considerable internal conflict and contestation concerning class commitments, "[t]he black consciousness philosophy has been able to give birth to a black theology of liberation because of its identification with the concerns and aspirations of the 'commoners' in the black community since precolonial times".⁹⁰

86 West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 75.

87 Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," 38.

88 Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," 184.

89 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 96, citing Cabral.

90 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 97.

Further reflection on how ordinary ‘commoner’ Black Christians appropriate the Bible is a feature of the third phase of South African Black Theology. Recasting the anecdote about the Bible and land, Tinyiko Maluleke not only uses inclusive language, but develops a body of work that suggests another question to ask of the anecdote. What might it mean for Black people ‘to have’ the Bible?

When White people came to our country they had the Bible and we (Blacks) had the land. They said, “let us pray”, and we closed our eyes to pray. At the end of the prayer, they (Whites) had the land and we had the Bible.

Tinyiko Maluleke’s work on Black Theology and African Christianities reorients this anecdote by prompting a focus on the verbs rather than the nouns. The anecdote quoted above, Maluleke argues, “captures something of the problem as diagnosed by Black Theology. It is the paradox of a severely subjugated people who have nevertheless taken to the religion of their oppressors rather enthusiastically. Even the process of decolonization—where and when it has occurred—has not reduced the apparent Black adherence to the Christian religion”.⁹¹ “The Bible” in the anecdote is “a symbol of the entire package” of missionary-colonial Christianity, and “[b]uilt into the anecdote is the suspicion that there might be a logical and coherent connection between Black poverty (material and spiritual) and Black adherence to Christianity. Equally taken for granted here is the ‘foreignness’ of Christianity to Black people”.⁹²

Maluleke recognises that “the suspicion of possible connections between Black adherence to the Christian religion and Black ‘poverty’ not only in South Africa but also on the continent is not the monopoly of Black Theology”. Indeed, he goes on to state that, “Almost all African Christian theologies have expressed the same suspicion—albeit in different ways”.⁹³ However, what is distinctive about South African Black Theology, in its second and third phases, is its ideological and analytical capacity to probe the connections between Black Africans and the Bible/Christianity.

The third phase of South African Black Theology, Maluleke maintains, reconsiders the place of African culture and/as religion as a way of asking whether Black culture might ‘re-place’ Christianity and the Bible as the primary locus

91 Maluleke, “Black Theology as Public Discourse” (paper presented at The Multi-Event 1999: Constructing a Language of Religion in Public Life. Cape Town, 1998), 1.

92 Maluleke, “Black Theology as Public Discourse”, 1.

93 Maluleke, “Black Theology as Public Discourse”, 1.

of Black Theology. So a distinctive feature of the third phase of Black Theology is the return of culture and the related recognition of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches (AICs) as “significant” interlocutors for Black Theology.⁹⁴ While race-class (as understood within the contours of apartheid racial capitalism) remains the central tenet of each of the phases of Black Theology, and while gender emerges within the first phase and becomes more foregrounded in the second phase, culture and/as religion is re-evaluated in phase three.⁹⁵ Whereas phase one Black Theology “ventured somewhat into cultural . . . issues”, argues Maluleke, phase two “became more and more concerned with the struggle of black people against racist, political and economic oppression”.⁹⁶ However, even within phase two, “At crucial moments connections with African culture would be made—provided that culture was understood as a site of struggle rather than

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- 94 Maluleke, “Black Theology as Public Discourse”, 2. The use of the word ‘return’ is deliberate, signalling as it does that “in an important sense black theology in South Africa began with the revolt of black Christians at the turn of the century, a revolt which found institutional expression in the African Independent Churches, or as they are commonly known today, African Initiated Churches. Black theology is rooted in the ongoing search by black Christians for authentic expressions of Christianity in Africa. For this reason, it is wrong to suggest that there is a fundamental difference between African Christian theology and Black theology. The latter is an expression of the former. As such, it is in continuity with it”; de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 150. See also Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 85–90.
- 95 An important contribution to this reappraisal of culture can be found in the work of Madipoane Masenya who has been working with African proverbs as a resource alongside biblical texts. Her work has begun to gather other South African biblical scholars around it; see for example Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele), “Engaging with the Book of Ruth as Single, African Christian Women: One African Woman’s Reflection,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013); Ramantswana, “Decolonizing Biblical Hermeneutics in the (South) African Context,” (Forthcoming); Mtshiselwa, “Re-Reading the Israelite Jubilee in Leviticus 25:8–55 in the Context of Land Redistribution and Socio-Economic Justice in South Africa: An African Liberationist Perspective” (Doctor of Literature and Philosophy, University of South Africa, 2015).
- 96 Maluleke, “African Traditional Religions in Christian Mission and Christian Scholarship: Re-Opening a Debate That Never Started,” *Religion and Theology* 5 (1998): 133; de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 146. As Alistair Kee recognises, one of the most significant contributions of South African Black Theology has been in “tracing the origins of oppression back to interest and relations of power” (a contribution he attributes to Mokgethi Motlhabi) and in so doing locating “oppression in the economic base of society”; Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology*, 87; Motlhabi, “Black Theology and Authority,” in *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (ed. Moore; London: C. Hurst & Co., 1973).

a fixed set of rules and behaviours".⁹⁷ Culture remains problematised in phase three, but the envisaged rapprochement with ATRs and AICs that characterises phase three foregrounds culture in a form not found in phase two.

Because of the class dimension of Black Theology's analysis of race (another distinctive feature of South African Black Theology)—for "Black Theology is first and foremost not about the powerful but about the powerless and the silenced"⁹⁸—both ATR and AICs offer Black Theology in its third phase "another chance of demonstrating solidarity with the poor", for ATR is the religion of the poor and AICs are the churches of the Christian poor.⁹⁹

The methodological consequence of this commitment to the Black poor, Maluleke points out, is that by making culture and/as religion a site of struggle, Black Theology relativises Christianity (and the Bible). For if, as Mosala has argued,¹⁰⁰ African culture and/as religion can be a primary site of a hermeneutics of struggle, supplemented only with a political class-based hermeneutics, then Christianity is not a necessary component in a Black Theology of liberation.¹⁰¹ A key question for Maluleke, echoing Mosala, is whether Black and African theologies have made "the necessary epistemological break from orthodox or classical Christian theology" required to effect the kind of critical and creative reappropriation of ATR and AICs envisaged by the third phase of Black Theology.¹⁰² Put differently, "What needs to be re-examined now ... is the extent to which the alleged popularity of Christianity assumed in South African black theology is indeed an accurate assessment of the religious state of black people. If it were to be shown that ATRs are as popular as Christianity among black South Africans then in not having given much concerted attention to them, Black theology might have overlooked an important resource".¹⁰³

Clearly, one of the important features of phase three Black Theology is the recognition, recovery, and revival of its links with ATRs and AICs, and in so doing renewing its dialogue with African Theology in its many and various forms. Indeed, Maluleke could be said to be revisiting and questioning Mofokeng's

97 Maluleke, "African Traditional Religions in Christian Mission," 133.

98 Maluleke, "Black Theology as Public Discourse", 2.

99 Maluleke, "Black Theology as Public Discourse", 2.

100 Mosala, "The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and Their Challenge to Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology* (eds. Mosala and Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986).

101 Maluleke, "African Traditional Religions in Christian Mission," 133.

102 Maluleke, "African Traditional Religions in Christian Mission," 135.

103 Maluleke, "African Traditional Religions in Christian Mission," 134.

assertion that “African traditional religions are too far behind most Blacks”.¹⁰⁴ Is this actually the case, asks Maluleke? Gabriel Setiloane asks the question even more starkly: “why do we continue to seek to convert to Christianity the devotees of African traditional religion?”.¹⁰⁵ “This,” says Maluleke, “is a crucial question for all African theologies [including South African Black Theology] as we move into the twenty-first century”.¹⁰⁶

Alongside this question, of course, looms the related question, prompted by Maluleke’s analysis, of whether Black Theology can be done without the Bible. If, as Mosala and Mofokeng argue, the value of the Bible is more strategic than substantive¹⁰⁷—a position vigorously contested by first phase Black Theology—then there are grounds for a Black Theology without ‘the Book’.

But even the strategic role of the Bible was contested by some within South African Black Theology, as Daniel Magaziner hears in his interview with Mokgethi Motlhabi, a phase two Black theologian. Motlhabi, says Magaziner, is “uncomfortable with analogizing the local with the biblical”.¹⁰⁸

Thus, to Mokgethi Motlhabi, comparing the Israelites to South African blacks was both dangerous and functionally meaningless. Motlhabi accepted that God was multiple and that theology looked different from different vantage points, but he could not accept the retelling of the Exodus narrative set in South Africa’s townships and Bantustans. The people in the Bible [said Motlhabi] “had their own lives.” “You can’t use examples from the stories of other people and claim that you know, because God liberated the Israelites, therefore he will liberate me.” Motlhabi gradually came to feel that Christianity—with its reliance on biblical precedent (witness Jesus’s repeated reference to Isaiah and other prophets)—did not provide an adequate hermeneutic for interpreting God’s role on earth. “The Bible is not the only story,” he asserted, and Black Theology “needed to be broader” than Christianity. That blacks were created in God’s image did not necessarily mean that God had

104 Mofokeng, “Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation,” 40.

105 Setiloane, “Where Are We in African Theology?,” in *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, Accra, December 17–23, 1977* (eds. Appiah-Kubi and Torres; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 64.

106 Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 13.

107 West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 103–130; see also Cady, “Hermeneutics and Tradition: The Role of the Past in Jurisprudence and Theology,” *Harvard Theological Journal* 79 (1986).

108 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 113.

covenanted with them, as had happened with the Israelites. To Motlhabi, the reality of apartheid's evil could not be explained away by looking only to scripture.¹⁰⁹

However, as Magaziner goes on to document, "many South African church people and activists found the Bible to be an effective and righteous way to explain the plight of South African blacks".¹¹⁰ Significantly, while Maluleke can envisage forms of African liberation 'theology' that do not draw on orthodox Christian categories, he accepts that the Bible remains an integral part of such 'theology'. Maluleke, like Mofokeng, doubts whether "pragmatic and moral arguments can be constructed in a manner that will speak to masses without having to deal with the Bible in the process of such constructions". And as long as it is a resource, it must be confronted, agrees Maluleke with Mosala, "precisely at a hermeneutical level".¹¹¹ However, unlike Mosala, who characterises the biblical hermeneutics of AICs as "the hermeneutics of mystification",¹¹² Maluleke is more observant and astute in his analysis, arguing that "on the whole, and in practice, [ordinary] African Christians are far more innovative and subversive in their appropriation of the Bible than they appear".¹¹³ While they "may mouth the Bible-is-equal-to-the-Word-of-God formula, they are actually creatively pragmatic and selective in their use of the Bible so that the Bible may enhance rather than frustrate their life struggles".¹¹⁴ The task before phase three Black Theology in Maluleke's analysis, then, is "not only to develop creative Biblical hermeneutic methods, but also to observe and analyse the manner in which African Christians 'read' and view the Bible".¹¹⁵ We must reflect on what it means for Black South Africans 'to have' the Bible. In

109 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 113. Randall Bailey, an African American biblical scholar, makes a similar argument when he argues "that unless one is aware of one's own cultural biases and interests in reading the text and appropriating the tradition, one may be seduced into adopting another culture, one which is diametrically apposed to one's own health and well-being"; "there are also passages in the biblical text itself, which are contrary to our experience of God, and we need to confront these with . . . discontinuity"; Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text," 77, 79.

110 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 113.

111 Maluleke, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order," 14.

112 Mosala, "The Relevance of African Traditional Religions," 57. In this essay Mosala articulates Black Theology's ambivalence towards AICs, both affirming the presence AICs have among the poor and working-class and problematising their biblical hermeneutics. For a fuller analysis of Mosala's position see West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 193–198.

113 Maluleke, "Half a Century of African Christian Theologies," 14–15.

114 Maluleke, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order," 13.

115 Maluleke, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order," 15.

other words, for the third phase of South African Black Theology there is both a constructive and a descriptive task with respect to the Bible.

This book, *The Stolen Bible*, is a direct response to Maluleke's summons from a white South African biblical scholar working within a Black Theology frame to make a contribution both to the descriptive task and the constructive task (in that order).¹¹⁶

The most recent work on South African Black Theology, written in the post-liberation period, uses the African cultural-religious (re)turn of phase three as a way of returning to and recasting the question of class. Heeding Maluleke's reminder that the phases of Black Theology, though historically ordered, are not discreet but overlap, we can consider the return of class as a marker of a fourth phase.

For the first and second phases of Black Theology the focus was on the political-economic dimensions of Black reality rather than the cultural-religious. This was a distinctive feature of South African Black Theology, demarcating it from other African theologies and other African Christianities. Culture and religion were significant, but only if infused with political and economic analysis, particular in the South African context where apartheid was constructed on particular (white and western) notions of culture (and religion).¹¹⁷ The third phase of Black Theology drew on these earlier understandings, but recognised that significant numbers of the Black poor had forged their own hybrid forms of various combinations of cultural and political and economic elements in the many diverse AICs.¹¹⁸ It was imperative, therefore, that Black Theology theorise and theologise this 'cultural-religious' reality. And because the third phase of Black Theology emerged in the mid-1990s, along with political liberation (though not economic liberation), there was space for a return to and a reassessment of the cultural-religious domain that had not been there before.

When the colonisers came to our country they had the Bible and we (the indigenous peoples) had the land. They said, "let us pray", and we closed

116 West, "The Vocation of an African Biblical Scholar on the Margins of Biblical Scholarship," *Old Testament Essays* 19 (2006); West, "White Theology in a Black Frame: Betraying the Logic of Social Location," in *Living on the Edge: Essays in Honour of Steve De Gruchy, Activist and Theologian* (eds. Cochrane, et al.; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2012).

117 Chikane, "The Incarnation in the Life of the People in Southern Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 51 (1985); Tlhagale, "Culture in an Apartheid Society," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 51 (1985).

118 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 191–192.

our eyes to pray. At the end of the prayer, the colonisers had the land and we had the Bible.

While most postcolonial biblical criticism avoids the question of class, this is not the case with the work of Makhosazana Nzimande, who stands in the tradition of South African Black Theology, supplementing its resources with the work of African women's biblical hermeneutics and postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Her "*imbokodo*" (grinding stone) hermeneutics draws deeply on Mosala's work, seeking to locate the struggles of "the oppressed and exploited in the text", and taking up his challenge of what it means to use the Bible to get the land back.¹¹⁹ She also draws on the Southern African postcolonial feminist work of Musa Dube, for whom the land is a central question, and who, like Mosala, recognises the importance of the economic domain.¹²⁰

The imperial powers and the apartheid beneficiaries must be held to account for the land they seized and the proceeds of this plunder, insists Nzimande. But, she continues, "for black African women in post-apartheid South Africa and in related postcolonial contexts where patriarchy reigns supreme, land restitution would not be beneficial unless there is a radical change in the patriarchal family structures"; in other words, "neo-tribal" patriarchal family structures are part of the problem.¹²¹

Nzimande's contribution to the post-apartheid land restitution project is to bring her South African context into dialogue with kindred struggles "over stolen lands" in the biblical text.¹²² Her first interpretive move follows Mosala, using historical-critical resources to locate the biblical text (1 Kings 21:1–16) historically. But her next move is not a materialist sociological analysis of this period; instead, she draws on feminist literary analysis in order to provide a detailed characterisation of the leading female character (queen Jezebel). The sociological contribution comes in her next move, where she locates the text within its imperial setting (Phoenician imperialism), giving attention to both the literary imperial setting and the socio-historical imperial setting. Her final interpretive move is to delineate the class relations within this imperial context (including Jezebel as part of a royal household).¹²³

119 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Postcolonial *Imbokodo* Reading of the Story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–16)," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (eds. de Wit and West; Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008), 230.

120 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 233.

121 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 234.

122 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 234.

123 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 234–237.

She then brings this text and her set of (*imbokodo*) interpretive resources into dialogue with the South African context, recovering the identity and roles of African queen mothers in their governance of African land. The recovery of African culture and/as religion, as envisaged by the third phase of Black Theology, is apparent. But, she does not conclude her work with this cultural-recovery. She pushes the boundaries of feminist postcolonial criticism to include matters of class, recovering the 'voices' of "those at the receiving end of the Queens' and Queen Mothers' policies".¹²⁴ She uses her *imbokodo* hermeneutics "to read with sensitivity towards the marginalised and dispossessed", recognising that "the beneficiaries" of such indigenous elites, including the queens and queen mothers, "are themselves and their sons, rather than the general grassroots populace they are expected to represent by virtue of their royal privileges".¹²⁵

"While a postcolonial *Imbokodo* hermeneutics acknowledges black female presence and activity [including female governance of African geographical territories] in African historiography, it also notes with regret the pervasive injustice that reigned supreme in African political systems of governance".¹²⁶ Remembering these powerful African women is a postcolonial imperative, insists Nzimande; but so is de-ideologising them, for in so doing we also remember those women from the lower classes these elite women had power over.¹²⁷

South African Black Theology has made a distinctive contribution to how the Bible is used and understood in African Christianity. Perhaps its most significant distinctive feature, particularly in phases two, three, and four, is the recognition that the Bible is intrinsically a site of struggle. It is not only the use of the Bible that is problematic for Black Theology, it is the very Bible itself. The "ideological upheavals in the text"¹²⁸ are the focus of each of these phases of Black Theology, as much as the ideological upheavals in contemporary African contexts. Indeed, for each of the four phases or strands of Black Theology it is the recognition that African interpretation takes place in the interface between the struggles within (and behind) the biblical text and the kindred struggles within contemporary African contexts. The very notion of 'struggle' or contestation is pivotal to the biblical hermeneutics of Black Theology. Mosala puts this rather eloquently:

124 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 243.

125 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 243.

126 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 242–243.

127 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 244, 252–254.

128 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 253.

The best way to smooth the 'troubled passage' between text and reader is to unleash the forces of struggle that each brings in the encounter with the other. In this way one can relive the struggle of the communities behind the texts as well as that of the communities this side of the texts as a new practice.¹²⁹

Another distinctive feature of South African Black Theology's biblical hermeneutics, particularly in phases two, three, and four is that economics and class, both in the Bible and in African contexts, must always be a decisive interpretive concern. While the complexities of African contexts and the many intersecting forms of marginalisation are acknowledged, the economic terrain of the African struggle is foregrounded, for without attention to the economic terrain there will be no recovery of African land.

The Africans' Bible: Other African Theologies

In the period prior to the liberation of South Africa (1994), African theologians often spoke, somewhat light-heartedly, of the difference between "theologies of being" and "theologies of bread",¹³⁰ using the Limpopo River as a boundary between these theological orientations. In more familiar terms, Desmond Tutu spoke of "African theology" as the prevailing form of theology north of the Limpopo, and "Black theology" as the prevailing form of theology south of the Limpopo.¹³¹ More analytically, theologies north of the Limpopo had an emphasis on the religio-cultural dimensions of African life, and theologies south of the Limpopo had an emphasis on the political-economic dimensions of African life.

The collapse of the Limpopo River as a boundary between these variant forms of African theology has been celebrated across the continent. The liberation of South Africa signalled a renewal, an African renaissance, for the continent as a whole. The "I Am an African" speech by Thabo Mbeki,¹³² then Deputy President of the country and the African National Congress, on the 8th May

129 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 124.

130 Balcomb, "From Liberation to Democracy: Theologies of Bread and Being in the New South Africa," *Missionalia* 26 (1998).

131 Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology: Soulmates or Antagonists?," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966–1979* (eds. Wilmore and Cone; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

132 Mbeki, *I Am an African* (African National Congress, 1996); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4322>.

1996, on the occasion of the adoption of the new Constitution of South Africa, became the rhetorical marker of the liberation of the continent. In this final section of the chapter, we briefly consider and locate the biblical hermeneutics of South African Black Theology among the biblical hermeneutics of Africa's other African liberation theologies.

In the protracted 'conversation' between African religio-cultural and political-economic realities and historical missionary Christianity, the most prevalent forms of African (liberation) theology have been: 'Inculturation Theology', 'Black Theology', 'Ujamaa Theology', 'Contextual Theology', and 'African Women's Theology'. Inculturation Theology (often referred to simply as 'African Theology') is found in every part of the African continent and is the oldest form of Africa's theologies. In the landmark publication, *African Theology en Route* (1983), there are contributions from African theologians from Nigeria, Zaire, Malawi, Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, Cameroun, South Africa, Uganda, and Lesotho.¹³³ African Women's Theology too is a continent wide phenomenon, nurtured by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.¹³⁴ South African Black Theology, Tanzanian Ujamaa Theology,¹³⁵ and South African Contextual Theology¹³⁶ are more definitively related to their particular contexts.

A useful way of analysing these African theologies is to identify how they engage with each of three constitutive elements: the African context, the Bible, and the ideo-theological frame that enables the interpretive 'dialogue' between context and text.¹³⁷ The starting point of each of Africa's African liberation theologies is the African context. As the Nigerian biblical scholar Justin Ukpong has succinctly stated, in African liberation theologies the African context is "the subject of interpretation".¹³⁸ But each of the various forms of African

133 Appiah-Kobi and Torres, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana*.

134 Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* (eds. Fabella and Torres; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983).

135 Magesa, "Reflections on the Church and Ujamaa," *Pastoral Orientation Service* 1 (1972).

136 Speckman and Kaufmann eds, *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001).

137 West, "Liberation Criticism," in *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (ed. Gooder; London: SPCK, 2008); Draper, "African Contextual Hermeneutics: Readers, Reading Communities, and Their Options between Text and Context," *Religion & Theology* 22 (2015).

138 Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995): 5.

liberation theology identifies distinctive features of the context that become the focus of its particular theological reflection. Inculturation Theology identifies religion and culture as the primary distinctive features of the African context. For South African Black Theology race and class are the key distinctive features within the terrain of political and economic struggle, as they are for South African Contextual Theology. Tanzanian Ujamaa Theology too locates the economic at the centre of its cultural analysis, and for African Women's Theology gender is the primary site of struggle. However, while each privileges particular distinctive features of the African context, they each recognise the intersections between their particular distinctive features and the range of other African identified contextual features.

With respect to the Bible there are a number of differences across these forms of African liberation theology. The most significant difference has to do with how the Bible is viewed by these variants of Africa's African liberation theologies. Along a continuum ranging from the Bible as 'the Word of God' to the Bible as itself a site of contestation and struggle, we can locate Inculturation Theology, Ujamaa Theology, Contextual Theology, African Women's Theology, and Black Theology, in this order. The continuum shifts from a hermeneutic of trust, where the Bible is interpreted as 'on the side' of African struggles, to a hermeneutic of suspicion, where the Bible is interpreted as ambiguous at best for African struggles.¹³⁹

Another difference with respect to the Bible resides in the methodologies brought to bear on the interpretive task. A historical and sociological emphasis is the norm across these variants, with only African Women's Theology engaging directly with the literary and semiotic dimensions of the biblical text. Besides the work of Itumeleng Mosala, the work of Ukpong would be a good example of the socio-historical methodological orientation of most African theologies,¹⁴⁰ and the work of Sarojini Nadar from South Africa would be a good example of a more literary-semiotic emphasis.¹⁴¹ This predilection for the socio-historical dimensions of the biblical text is understandable for a number of reasons, not least because this has been the dominant method of the (missionary-western) academy which has trained the vast majority of African

139 West, "Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa," in *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (eds. Botta and Andinach; *Semeia Studies*, ed. Yee; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

140 Ukpong, "The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Lk 16:1–13): An Essay in the Inculturation of Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 73 (1996).

141 Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Dube; Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

theologians and biblical scholars. But there are other more contextual reasons for this choice, including the interpretive intent in all forms of African liberation theology to find lines of connection between the African context and the Bible; and because African struggles are historically and sociologically located, reaching back into cultural and colonial pasts with enduring post-colonial effects, resonances are sought with kindred struggles in the history and sociology of the biblical tradition. There are, however, marked differences with the kinds of sociological method used, related to the particular distinctive features being addressed and to the ideological orientation of the African interpreter.

The identification of a theological mediation between African context and biblical text introduces the third 'pole' of this analysis. African theologies are 'tri-polar', to use the term suggested by the South African biblical scholar Jonathan Draper,¹⁴² allocating an explicit place to theological and ideological appropriation.¹⁴³ Ukpong puts it clearly when he says that the goal of comparative interpretation is "the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation".¹⁴⁴

Black Theology, shaped as it is by Marxist ideological conceptualisations, brings African class conflicted contexts into dialogue with biblical texts that are themselves 'sites of struggle', adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion towards the Bible. African Women's Theology occupies a tensive terrain between the hermeneutics of suspicion of Feminist and Womanist theologies and the hermeneutics of trust associated with Inculturation Theology. So, for example, in the work of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians, a continent wide project, one will find a tension between suspicion and trust with respect to the capacity of the Bible to speak a liberating word in the context of gender struggles.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, African Women's Theology finds itself doubly conflicted, both appropriating but also problematising 'traditional' African

142 Draper, "Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What Is Contextual Exegesis in the New South Africa?," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001).

143 West, "Interpreting 'the Exile' in African Biblical Scholarship: An Ideo-Theological Dilemma in Postcolonial South Africa," in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers Read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa Otswa/Otssa, Pretoria August 2007* (eds. Becking and Human; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

144 Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 24.

145 Dube and Kanyoro eds, *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004).

culture.¹⁴⁶ Common across all these variants of Africa's African theologies is a post-colonial ideo-theological orientation. The imperial and colonial past, as well as the neo-colonial present, are evident elements in all of Africa's African liberation theologies. Though 'post-colonial' discourse as such is a relatively new addition to African theology and biblical studies,¹⁴⁷ a post-colonial ideo-theological orientation has been there from the very beginning.¹⁴⁸ Finally, and returning to the earliest impulses of Africa's African liberation theologies, each variant is neo-indigenous in its own way. African religion and culture are the ground from which they grow, even if this ground is interrogated as a site of struggle.

Each of these distinctive forms of Africa's African theologies might be considered an African 'liberation' theology, though the term was contested in the formative years of African theology. In the "Final communiqué" of the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians, in Accra, Ghana in 1977, there is recognition of the plurality of "African theologies" and a discernment of three "trends" or "approaches":

1. one which, while admitting the inherent values in the traditional religions, sees in them a preparation for the Gospel;
2. a critical theology which comes from contact with the Bible, openness to African realities, and dialogue with non-African theologies;
3. black theology in South Africa, which takes into consideration the experiences of oppression and the struggle for liberation and gets its inspiration from the biblical faith as expressed in African language and categories as well as from the experience and reflections of black North Americans.¹⁴⁹

In this emic, early African self-understanding of "the dynamism of the theological movement on the continent", it is only South African Black Theology that is designated a 'liberation' theology. And while this has much to do with the historical moment of this conference, a time when most of the continent was politically independent but South Africa was not,¹⁵⁰ it also had

146 Masenya, "Killed by AIDS and Buried by Religion: African Female Bodies in Crisis," in *Let My People Stay! Researching the Old Testament in Africa* (ed. Holter; Nairobi: Acton, 2006).

147 Dube, "Reading for Decolonization (John 4:1–42)," *Semeia* 75 (1996).

148 Appiah-Kobi and Torres, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana*.

149 Appiah-Kobi and Torres, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana*, 192, 189–195.

150 See de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 150–151.

something to do with an African consensus, at that time, of the contextual priorities of Africa's African theologies. The "Final communiqué" goes on to identify the five primary "sources" of African theologies, in this order: "the Bible and Christian heritage", "African anthropology", "African traditional religions", "African Independent churches", and "Other African realities". Included under the final category is the following description:

The experiences of cultural forms of life and arts, extended family, hospitality, and communal life are the expression of deep feelings of love and care. The struggles for the transformation of socio-economic systems, the struggles against racism, sexism, and other forms of economic, political, social, and cultural oppressions, are all to be taken seriously as sources for theology.¹⁵¹

Religio-cultural concerns are both the primary concerns and the primary sources of Africa's African theologies. African 'liberation' theologies (alluded to in the final sentence), it would seem, are important but not considered mainstream African theologies. But what if we were to privilege theological and biblical interpretive process or method rather than theological content in our attempt to understand the notion of 'liberation' theology?

Liberation theologies, argues Per Frostin, are constructed around five inter-related concepts, which can be found across a range of geo-political sites of struggle. Frostin identifies the five key conceptual characteristics of liberation theologies as: "the choice of 'interlocutors', the perception of God, social analysis, the choice of theological tools, and the relationship between theory and practice".¹⁵² Frostin's conceptual characterisation of liberation theologies is significant because it draws directly on the primary documentation of a wide range of liberation theologies in dialogue with each other. The data Frostin uses is drawn substantially from the self-constituted dialogue of 'Third World' theologians, including African theologians, working together in forums such as EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

These five concepts cohere within a process, and this process is central to Frostin's analysis. With respect to the first and fundamental conceptual feature, the choice of interlocutors, "Liberation theologians", argues Frostin, "focus on a new issue seldom discussed in established theology: Who are the interlocutors of theology? Or, Who are asking the questions that theologians

151 Appiah-Kobi and Torres, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana, 192–193, 189–195.*

152 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 6.

try to answer?"¹⁵³ Or, to use the language used by Musa Dube (from Botswana) and Gerald West (from South Africa) within the discourse of biblical liberation hermeneutics,¹⁵⁴ "Who are biblical scholars reading 'with', when they read the Bible?" To these questions liberation hermeneutics gives a decisive answer: "a preferential option for the poor".¹⁵⁵ Echoing the words of Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, the primary interlocutors of liberation theology are "the poor, the exploited classes, the marginalized races, all the despised cultures".¹⁵⁶ This choice of interlocutors is more than an ethical commitment, it is also an epistemological commitment, requiring an interpretive starting point within the social experience and social analysis of the poor and marginalised themselves. The actual presence and participation of the (organised) poor and marginalised in the doing of theology is vital and pivotal.

With respect to this key concept, each of the variants of Africa's African theologies could be considered a liberation theology, for they each reach beyond the academy and into local communities. And while the core of their constituencies may be distinct, there are significant areas of overlap. For Ujamaa Theology, for example, "participation" in local African village community is a constituent element of this form of African theology.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Ujamaa Theology recognises the Christian theological notion of 'the trinity' as a model for human life in community, emphasising, in the words of Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti, "solidarity, totality, and participation".¹⁵⁸ The very communitarian nature of God, co-opted from missionary theology's concept of 'the trinity', calls forth a form of African theology.

Turning to the second conceptual category of liberation theologies, the perception of God, Frostin notes that the first emphasis, the choice of interlocutors, "has important consequences not only for the interpretation of social reality but also for the understanding of God".¹⁵⁹ The core 'theo-logical' question liberation theologies ask is not whether God exists or not, but whose side God is on. As the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)

153 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 6.

154 West and Dube eds, *"Reading With": African Overtures (Semeia; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1996)*.

155 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 6.

156 Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), 241.

157 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 51.

158 Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God* (Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1978), 62.

159 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 7.

so aptly said, "The question about God in the world of the oppressed is not knowing whether God exists or not, but knowing on which side God is".¹⁶⁰

In this respect, all Africa's African theologies are liberation theologies, focussing their concern not on whether God exists or not, for surely African survival is itself a testimony to God's presence,¹⁶¹ but on how theology ought to envisage the presence of God amidst the neo-colonial idols of death. So the central question posed to any faith tradition is whether and to what extent that tradition deifies the ideologies used to sacralise structures of oppression.¹⁶²

However, recent events in Africa have prompted Mario Aguilar to ask whether African theologies, as liberation theologies, ought not to reconsider the question, not of God's existence, but of God's presence. After the Rwandan genocide, he argues, African (as well as Latin American and Asian) liberation theologies in doing their "theologizing from the side of the poor must engage with a phenomenon previously considered European: the absence or silence of God in times of war, ethnic cleansing or genocide".¹⁶³ However, the reality is that this old European question has yet to become a new question in Africa's liberation theologies, though the advent of HIV and AIDS in Africa has raised related questions, as we will see in the next chapter.

The enduring haunting question for liberation theologies remains the identity of God. For example, discerning "the God of life" from "the idols of death"¹⁶⁴ in the Bible is difficult to do when confronted with Black Theology's ambiguous Bible or a Bible consisting of ideologically contending redactional layers and textual voices. What Black Theology has regularly reiterated is the contested nature of the divine, in both the Bible and the theological tradition. The God of life is the true God, but there are other contending gods, prime among them 'Mammon' (wealth). "You cannot serve God and Mammon", says Jesus (in Matthew 6:24). For liberation theologies, argues Frostin drawing on this biblical metaphor, the struggle against Mammon "is seen as the main task for theology".¹⁶⁵ And it is here that we may discern a substantive difference

160 Fabella and Torres eds, *Doing Theology in a Divided World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 190.

161 Haddad, "The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance," *Agenda* 61 (2004).

162 Fabella and Torres, *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, 190.

163 Aguilar, *Theology, Liberation and Genocide: A Theology of the Periphery* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 1.

164 These are phrases used by Latin American liberation theologian Frans Hinkelammert to characterise the liberation struggle 'after liberation'; Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986).

165 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 7.

across Africa's African theologies, for they do not all foreground the economic. Indeed, until quite recently Inculturation Theology and African Women's Theology have done very little work on economic matters,¹⁶⁶ and even today in our current globalised neo-liberal capitalist economic climate their engagement with the economic terrain of African life is surprising sparse. But the economic is the primary site of struggle in Black Theology and Ujamaa Theology. This is clear in the centrality of Marxist and materialist categories in both. For Mosala it is a materialist analogy of method that 'connects' "the struggles inherent in black history and culture" and "the struggles behind and in the text of the Bible".¹⁶⁷ For Julius Nyerere, the first president of a liberated Tanzania, it is an imperative for Ujamaa Theology to recognise that the god of 'profit' must be replaced by the people of God, humanity.¹⁶⁸

The third conceptual category, that of the necessity for social analysis, also derives from the first, argues Frostin, for the option for the poor as the chief interlocutors of liberation theology is based on a conflictual understanding of social reality, affirming that there is a difference between the perspectives of the privileged ('from above') and of the poor ('from below'). EATWOT reports characterise the world as "a divided world", where doing theology and biblical interpretation can only be done "within the framework of an analysis of these conflicts".¹⁶⁹

The historical emergence of liberation theology was within the context of economic struggle. The Dar es Salaam report of EATWOT (1976) was unequivocal, stating that "the division among rich and poor was perceived as the major phenomenon of contemporary history".¹⁷⁰ Central to the social analysis of liberation hermeneutics is the relationship between 'theo-logy' and economy. As we have seen, the struggle against the god/idol Mammon is the core struggle for liberation hermeneutics. The pursuit of economic profit, the kernel value of capitalism, it was argued, "is incompatible with faith in God".¹⁷¹ The cult of Mammon distorts Christian faith, substituting faith in the true God with faith in the false gods of an idolatrous economic system. And it is the poor who

166 But see Dube, "To Pray the Lord's Prayer in the Global Economic Era (Matt. 6:9–13)," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000); Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel."

167 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 103.

168 Nyerere, *Freedom and Development: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1968–73* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1973), 219.

169 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 8.

170 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 8.

171 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 7.

“have unsubstitutable insights into the difference between God and the idols”,¹⁷² both in their own contexts and in the Bible.

However, as Frostin notes, though subsequent EATWOT meetings confirmed the priority of the economic domain, other domains of struggle gradually pushed their way onto the EATWOT agenda. While EATWOT consistently stressed the interrelatedness of these struggles, many of the debates within EATWOT centred around the priority given to and the relationships between different levels of oppression. Generally speaking, says Frostin, the discussion “followed continental lines of divisions, where Latin Americans have emphasized the value of socioeconomic analysis while Africans and Asians have tended to stress religio-cultural analysis”, and where women from each of these continents consistently emphasised “the male-female contradiction, virtually neglected in Dar es Salaam”.¹⁷³ By the late 1970s the privileging of Marxist socio-economic analysis was being contested on a broad front.

While Frostin is correct in his analysis of the general tendencies of particular continents, the African continent was, as we have seen, itself divided on what aspects of the African reality should form the focus of analysis and what analytical concepts should be used. The use of Marxist social analysis was a source of regular contestation among African liberation theologians, with Inculturation Theology (the most prevalent form of theology in West, East, and Central Africa) and Black Theology (the most prominent form of liberation theology in Southern Africa) disagreeing on the appropriateness of Marxist analytical categories and their ideological infrastructure.¹⁷⁴

Given the importance of Marxist categories and concepts in the historical formation of liberation theologies, including South African Black Theology,¹⁷⁵ Tanzanian Ujamaa Theology,¹⁷⁶ and South African Contextual Theology,¹⁷⁷ and the ongoing neo-colonial economic profile of African nation-states within a globalised world, it could be argued that an economic orientation should reside at the core of any of Africa’s African theologies for it to be considered a ‘liberation theology’. Frostin is right to emphasise methodology (or process)

172 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 7.

173 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 8.

174 Tutu, “Black Theology/African Theology: Soulmates or Antagonists?”

175 Mosala, “A Materialist Reading of Micah,” in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (eds. Gottwald and Horsley; Markyknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

176 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 41–44.

177 Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 219.

over content as the distinguishing characteristic of liberation theologies,¹⁷⁸ and if the core tenant of its methodology is the process by which the poor and marginalised are the primary interlocutors in the production of theology, then the economic must have a primary place.

On the other hand, it is important to recognise how hard it was for 'other' forms of oppression to find recognition in EATWOT. African women had to push hard in order to place gender on the agenda of Africa's African theologies.¹⁷⁹ The recovery of African culture after centuries of colonial denigration made it difficult for EATWOT to hear the 'internal' critique of African culture posed by African Women's Theology. But gradually each of the various forms of Africa's African theologies came to recognise and engage with patriarchy, masculinity, and (most recently and reluctantly) sexuality.¹⁸⁰ The advent of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s has been a considerable catalyst in this regard.¹⁸¹ And other forms of marginalisation, to do with, for example, disability,¹⁸² ethnicity,¹⁸³ and ecology/land,¹⁸⁴ are also finding a place in African theologies. This multiplicity of intersecting marginalisations is forging important intersections between liberation, post-colonial, and queer hermeneutics, particularly in biblical hermeneutics.¹⁸⁵ For Africa's African theologies have been impacted by postmodern, post-colonial, and queer conceptual frameworks that have deconstructed their traditional binary forms of social analysis.¹⁸⁶ Theorising the intersections

178 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 11.

179 Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies."

180 West, "Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa." For some discussion on the reluctance of Black theologians to be prophetic with respect to sexuality see Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 189–190.

181 Dube and Kanyoro, *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*.

182 Bruce, "Constructions of Disability (Ancient and Modern): The Impact of Religious Beliefs on the Experience of Disability," *Neotestamentica* 44, no. 2 (2010).

183 Nyirimana, "Patrimonialism in the Causes of the Division of the Kingdom in Israel: A Reading of the Division Narrative from the Perspective of the Rwandan Context of Social Conflict," *Old Testament Essays* 24, no. 3 (2011).

184 Mugambi and Vähäkangas, *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001).

185 Punt, "Queer Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Biblical Interpretation," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (eds. Hornsby and Stone; vol. 67 of *Semeia Studies*; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

186 Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel."

between these forms of marginalisation and the economic remains an ongoing summons for Africa's African theologies.¹⁸⁷

The fourth conceptual category in Frostin's analysis of the methodology of liberation hermeneutics is closely related to the third and has to do with the choice of interpretive tools with which to engage the theological tradition and the biblical text. "With a different interlocutor and a different perception of God, liberation theologians need different tools for their theological reflection", and so while in the past theological tools have usually come from philosophy, the social sciences have assumed this role in liberation theologies.¹⁸⁸ As we have seen above, a range of resources from the social sciences have been used, both in the analysis of contemporary African contexts and in the analysis of the theological tradition and the biblical text across the full range of Africa's African theologies, so that in this respect we can consider each of them a liberation theology.

A key relationship in liberation theology is the relationship between the actual experience/knowledge of social reality and struggle of the poor and marginalised and the forms of social analysis provided by the social sciences. The starting point for biblical liberation hermeneutics, in the words of the South African liberation theologian Itumeleng Mosala, are "eyes that are hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today" as they probe "the kin struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities".¹⁸⁹ This primary experience is then 'resourced' with tools from the social sciences, which are used to interrogate past and present systemic power structures.¹⁹⁰

As we have indicated, the dominant modes of analysis in the discipline of biblical studies historically and institutionally have been historical and sociological,¹⁹¹ and so the formative years of liberation hermeneutics, whether in Brasil, South Africa, or the Philippines, were dominated by socio-historical methods of analysis of the Bible. The consequence of privileging socio-historical analysis in liberation hermeneutics has been the foregrounding of the socially engaged 'scholarly' reader and the 'marginalising', to some extent, of the 'ordinary' 'commoner' reader. However, partly in recognition of the non-egalitarian effects of socio-historical modes of reading the Bible and

187 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel."

188 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 9.

189 Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," 196.

190 West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 131–173.

191 Lategan, "Current Issues in the Hermeneutic Debate," *Neotestamentica* 18 (1984).

partly because of poststructuralist critique,¹⁹² socially engaged biblical scholars from many contexts of struggle, including African contexts, have gradually embraced the full range of interpretive methodologies, including a diverse array of literary-semiotic and thematic-metaphoric modes.¹⁹³

Literary-semiotic-type and thematic-metaphoric-type scholarly modes of reading the Bible, adopted in particular by African Women's Theology and Contextual Theology, though not how most ordinary readers interpret the Bible, do offer more egalitarian entry points for ordinary readers to participate within a liberation paradigm on more equal terms with scholarly readers. However, as already indicated, there is something of a tension here, for central to liberation hermeneutics is the contribution of structured and systematic—critical—modes of analysing the Bible to communities of ordinary readers of the Bible. This is because biblical liberation hermeneutics is not only about an analogy of struggle (the biblical text in its ancient context // the poor in their contemporary context) but also about an analogy of method (critical modes of interpreting the ancient text // critical modes of interpreting the contemporary context);¹⁹⁴ and the latter has been a particular emphasis of South African Black Theology. But notwithstanding the importance of these scholarly critical resources, there seems to be a growing recognition in liberation hermeneutics of the presence of already existing critical forms of discourse among the poor and marginalised,¹⁹⁵ so that socially engaged biblical scholars should

192 West, "Religion and the Left: An Introduction," *Monthly Review* 36 (1984): 17; West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*.

193 Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (New York: Orbis, 1987); Míguez, "Apocalyptic and the Economy: A Reading of Revelation 18 from the Experience of Economic Exclusion," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (eds. Segovia and Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth"; Dreher, *The Walk to Emmaus* (São Leopoldo: Centro de Estudos Bíblicos, 2004).

194 Cavalcanti, "Social Location and Biblical Interpretation: A Tropical Reading," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (eds. Segovia and Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

195 But see Segundo, "The Shift within Latin American Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 52 (1985); Nadar, "Beyond the 'Ordinary Reader' and the 'Invisible Intellectual': Shifting Contextual Bible Study from Liberation Discourse to Liberation Pedagogy," *Old Testament Essays* 22, no. 2 (2009); Nadar, "Hermeneutics of Transformation? A Critical Exploration of the Model of Social Engagement between Biblical Scholars and Faith Communities," in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (eds. Dube, et al.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012). For some reflection on com-

understand their collaboration as offering their critical reading resources alongside the local resources already present in communities of ordinary readers of the Bible.¹⁹⁶

Here too each of the African theologies being considered could be considered a liberation theology, for each of them has grappled with how to integrate the capacities of the social sciences with the epistemological perspectives of their core constituencies.

Frostin's fifth and final conceptual feature follows from this, focussing on the dialectics of praxis and theology. Liberation theology conceptualises itself as "a second act". "The first act" is constituted by the actual liberation struggles of the poor and marginalised and their reflections on these struggles. This is praxis. This praxis then becomes the ground, the foundational reality, for 'doing theology'. Such a dialectic between theology and praxis, argues Frostin astutely, "is not only of ethical but also of epistemological relevance".¹⁹⁷ In the language of the South African *Kairos Document*, "people's theology" precedes "prophetic [liberation] theology".¹⁹⁸

ments made to me by a colleague, Maarman Sam Tshehla, about the tendency to equate 'critical' with 'western', see West, "Beyond the 'Critical' Curtain: Community-Based Service Learning in an African Context," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 2 (2004), 71–82.

196 West, "Beyond the 'Critical' Curtain: Community-Based Service Learning in an African Context," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 2 (2004); West, "Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS," in *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink* (eds. Havea and Pearson; London: Equinox Publishing, 2011). Magaziner contributes a potentially helpful distinction to the debate, arguing that what Black Theology referred to as "conscientization" was often a "euphemism" for "politicization"; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 132. So while we might argue, with James Scott, that the poor are always already 'conscientised', there are real constraints on them being 'politicised'. As Scott argues, no matter how severe the domination, and Scott focuses on extreme forms of domination, dignity always demands a response to domination. In cases of intense and sustained surveillance by the forces of domination, dignity's expression finds its place in the hidden transcript, a discourse "of dignity, of negation, and of justice" that is articulated and elaborated in those social sites that the marginalized are able to forge and secure in the face of surveillance. Central to his analysis is the recognition that subordinate classes "are less constrained at the level of thought and ideology, since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety, and more constrained at the level of political action and struggle, where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available to them"; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 114, 91.

197 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 10.

198 Kairos, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 34–35, note 15.

Each of Africa's African theologies is organically 'based' within the particular social struggles of particular communities in particular African contexts. Though ecclesial and academic temptations constantly threaten to exert their hold on the African middle-class intellectuals who do prophetic theology, people's theology is the lived and embodied theology of African masses who refuse to allow the professional theologians of Africa's African theologies to settle too comfortably in the church or university, summoning them to do African liberation theology with them in their various sites of struggle.

Though a significant voice in South African engagements with the Bible, these scholarly voices are a minority voice. The next chapter considers the lived and embodied 'people's theology' of ordinary commoner South Africans.

The Embodied Bible

I would rather come to [Contextual] Bible Study than go to church.

The Bible inhabits and haunts the arts in Africa. From the icons of Egyptian Coptic Christianity on the northern extremity of the continent to the rap music of the contemporary descendants of the Khoi and the San peoples of South Africa at the southern tip of the continent, from the literary works of Chinua Achebe in the west of the continent to the literary works of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o in the east, from the film industries of Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, the Bible is 're-membered'.¹

Writing about the Bible and the arts in Africa, Kenneth Ngwa adds his comment on the anecdote about the Bible and land discussed in the previous chapter, arguing that,

Almost proverbial in its terseness and provocative claims, this statement partly turns on what it means to "have" the Bible, but also, even more importantly, *how* it is that Africa and Africans have the Bible. Even with major changes in literacy as a function of missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa, the Bible continues to be largely encountered largely in oral form. That is, for millions of Africans, the Bible *as spoken word* rather than *as written book* plays a major role in Christian life, theological reflection, and social engagement. The reasons are multiple, including the aesthetics and value of the spoken word as a creative, powerful force in African culture, and the importance of *storytelling* (not simply story) as a communal event, and therefore of the embodied (voice, body, attire, etc.) nature of verbal art.²

As Ngwa goes on to argue, the full array of "verbal art forms", including "proverbial speech, music, drama, debates", 'engage' the Bible as a "resource", remaining "fully cognizant of the Bible's tortured political and religious history on the continent". "Verbal art", he continues, "is thus 'community art' informed

1 West and Ngwa, "African Art," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Arts* (ed. Beal; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

2 West and Ngwa, "African Art." Though the essay cited is jointly authored, these insights are Ngwa's, and I acknowledge them as such.

by the aesthetics of wit, verbal contest, spontaneity, and even survival in distinct political and cultural spaces. . . . It probes some of the power struggle that accompanies the investment of authority in the technologies-graphic and/or verbal-of biblical interpretation".³ It is specifically the "fluidity of the spoken word and the opportunity—through performance—to speak directly and contemporaneously to lived experiences" that heightens "the importance of verbal art and its relevance to how Africans 'have' the Bible as a text, as well as to the moral universe that the Bible occupies in the lives of Christians".⁴

In this chapter we begin with some reflection on a prevalent use of the Bible across most Christian communities in Southern Africa, corporate preaching. We then consider two related pieces of verbal art, the Bible in song, one old and one new, the older taking on new contexts in its renderings and the newer drawing on the older to speak with the older about untimely death. We then consider two examples of embodied readings of the Bible in the context of HIV, one a series of reflections on the biblical book of Job by members of an HIV support group over a period of many years, and one the tormented linocut rendition of the HIV and AIDS beast that lurks within African realities. We conclude with two examples of narrative art, an African linocut commentary in nine panels of a biblical story, and a dystopian South African 'Jesus' film.

The Marabi Bible: Corporate Preachings of the Bible

Clearly African Christians relate to the Bible in various ways. As Tinyiko Maluleke has reminded us,⁵ more attention needs to be paid to how Africans of all kinds actually *read* and *view* the Bible. This book, *The Stolen Bible*, is about how Africans of all kinds actually read and view the Bible, and it builds on some of my earlier work in which I explore a range of metaphors in an attempt to grasp some of the dimensions of Africans engagements with the biblical text.

For example, I have borrowed from colleagues in related contexts who have grappled with similar concerns, arguing that African 'users' of the Bible

3 West and Ngwa, "African Art."

4 West and Ngwa, "African Art."

5 Maluleke, "Black and African Theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from Our Own Wells," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 96 (1996): 15.

're-member' a 'dis-membered' Bible, by means of "guerilla exegesis",⁶ by reading with the nose,⁷ by a process of "engraf(ph)ting",⁸ by "a looseness, even a playfulness" towards text,⁹ by "conjuring" with the Bible.¹⁰

Drawing on more local, South African, resources I have found '*marabi*' to be an evocative metaphor for African biblical interpretation. This "neo-traditional" form of music, to use Christopher Ballantine's term and example,¹¹ shares many similarities with a range of Southern African forms, including corporate Bible preaching.

Ballantine uses the term 'neo-traditional' to describe the derivation of an early form of South African jazz, *marabi*, from traditional African musics.¹² Fundamental to indigenous African musics, argues Ballantine, is "a cyclic harmonic pattern". This rhythmic repetition of harmonic patterns, provided traditionally by a drum or, in an urban situation, "a player shaking a tin filled with small stones", formed the "root progression" on top of which melodies (and sometimes lyrics) were superimposed. These melodies too followed a cyclical form, with "cyclical repetitions of one melody or melodic fragment yielding eventually, perhaps, to a similar treatment of another melody or fragment, and perhaps then still others, each melody possibly from a different source. And in this manner 'you played with no stop—you could play for an hour-and-a-half without stopping'".¹³

The citation within the quotation, from an interview conducted by Ballantine with *marabi* musician Edward Sililo, captures another aspect of this neo-traditional form of interpretation: its duration. That *marabi* goes on and on is an element of its form. But duration is not an end in itself, which becomes

6 Hendricks, "Guerrilla Exegesis: 'Struggle' as a Scholarly Vocation: A Postmodern Approach to African-American Interpretation," *Semeia* 72 (1995).

7 de Oliveria, "Feminist Theology in Brazil," in *Women's Vision: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action* (ed. Ortega; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995).

8 Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 152.

9 Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretative History," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Felder; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 88–89.

10 Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

11 Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1993).

12 Ballantine, *Marabi Nights*, 26.

13 Ballantine, *Marabi Nights*, 26–27.

clear when we listen to Wilson Silgee's recollection of what it was like to attend a *marabi* party:

Marabi: that was the environment! It was either organ but mostly piano. You get there, you pay your ten cents. You get your scale [drinking vessel] of whatever concoction there is, then you dance. It used to start Friday night right through Sunday evening. You get tired, you go home, go and sleep, come back again: bob a time, each time you get in. The piano and with the audience making a lot of noise. Trying to make some theme out of what is playing.¹⁴

There is almost an element of contestation in this description; *marabi* is a communal attempt to make some common sense or theme "out of what is playing". *Marabi* is a communal and cyclical (and, perhaps, contested) act of interpretation.

While *marabi* was the interpretative form (of music) of secular social occasions,¹⁵ particularly in South African Black urban areas, its form mirrors the interpretation of the Bible in countless African churches of all and every denomination and in both rural and urban contexts. *Marabi* as music and *marabi* as a metaphor for biblical interpretation are examples of those "purposive act[s] of reconstruction" in which indigenous peoples have "created a middle ground between a displaced 'traditional' order and a modern world whose vitality was both elusive and estranging", by "the repositioning of signs in sequences of practice", a bricolage, that promises "to subvert the divisive structures of colonial society, returning to the displaced a tangible identity and the power to impose coherence upon a disarticulated world".¹⁶

But my use of *marabi* to designate forms of indigenous African biblical interpretation is more than a metaphor for this particular form; the hermeneutic moves which characterise *marabi* are found in other neo-indigenous forms. In his attempt at "developing a new critical methodology for oral texts", Duncan Brown tracks, historically and hermeneutically, the traces of a "cyclical construction" that, in his words, "appears to be bound up with African ontology which (in contrast to the linear, progressive, and teleological colonial-Christian model) emphasizes the circularity of religious, social and historical

14 Cited in Ballantine, *Marabi Nights*, 28–29.

15 Ballantine, *Marabi Nights*, 26.

16 Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 253–254.

life".¹⁷ Brown finds this cyclical patterning in a diverse range of African oral forms: in the songs and stories of the /Xam 'Bushmen',¹⁸ in the formal public praise-poems (*izibongi*) of the Zulu praise poets (*izimbongi*),¹⁹ in the hymns of Isaiah Shembe and the Church of the Nazarites,²⁰ in the Black Consciousness poetry of Soweto poet Ingoapele Madingoane,²¹ and in the political resistance poetry of Mzwakhe Mbuli and Alfred Qabula.²²

Brown's description of the hymns of Isaiah Shembe is remarkable for its resonance with *marabi*. Brown reminds us of the work of Bengt Sundkler on Shembe in which Sundkler stresses that, "The hymn is not first of all a versified statement about certain religious facts. The hymn is sacred rhythm. And the rhythm is naturally accentuated by the swinging to and fro of their bodies, by loud hand-clapping and by beating the drum".²³ Brown continues:

The start of the dance is signalled by the beating of the ughubu drum [the Nazarite drum which has a central place in their worship], and the hymn leader then begins to sing. She or he may begin at any point in the hymn, offering a lead which is taken up by the group of singers. Rhythm takes precedence over textual fidelity to linear structure (beginning-middle-end), and the singing of a four-verse hymn may last for up to an hour, with the leader taking the group through the hymn many times, not always in the same verse order, and ending at any point in the hymn.²⁴

Moving from description into analysis, via the work of Carol Muller on Nazarite hymns, Brown underlines Muller's argument, citing her work and arguing:

Shembe's "reinsertion of the traditional concept of cyclicity into the articulation of ritual time and space" has political implications in the colonial context of the hymns' generation and performance: "Isaiah's

17 Brown, *Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 107.

18 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 66.

19 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 107.

20 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 150. See also Sithole, "Performance, Power and Agency: Isaiah Shembe's Hymns and the Sacred Dance in the Church of the Nazarites" (PhD, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010).

21 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 184.

22 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 229.

23 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 150, citing Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 196.

24 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 150.

insistence on this trope most powerfully reflected the symbolic contest between colonized and colonizer, whose organization of time and space was symbolized in the principle of linearity".²⁵

The particular usefulness of Brown's study is that it has an historical dimension. Both the songs and stories of the /Xam and the praise-poems of indigenous Southern African peoples predate the missionaries and colonisers. Brown's hermeneutic analysis confirms Ballantine's, identifying a communal cyclical interpretative process, founded on a rhythmic form (whether of drumming, dancing, singing, or praying). The emerging 'text' is constructed on cycles of repetition which participants may contribute to by making "'cuts' back to a prior series through an explicit repetition of elements which have gone before".²⁶

We find just such a communal and cyclical process of interpretation of the Bible in almost every Southern African church. The most astute analysis of this interpretive phenomenon is found in the work of Musa Dube.²⁷ She characterises this form of interpretation, what she calls a *Semoya* (of the Spirit) interpretation, as a communal and participatory mode of interpretation through the use of songs, dramatised narration and repetition.²⁸ The biblical text, decided on for the occasion by an individual, once read, becomes the property of the group. All, both young and old, women and men, clergy and laity are free to stand up and expound on the text in their own understanding. While they are doing this, listeners may "contribute to the interpretation by occasionally interrupting with a song that expounds on the theme of the passage", or the "interpreter herself/himself can pause and begin a song that expresses the meaning of the passage".²⁹ Listener-interpreters, through song, participate in the interpretation of the passage. Such interruption-interpretations are particularly significant, suggests Dube, because of the form that exposition tends to take.

25 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 150, citing. Muller, *Nazarite Women's Performance in South Africa*, 64.

26 Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 107–108.

27 Dube, "Readings of *Semoya*: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matt. 15:21–28," *Semeia* 73(1996): 119–121, Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 190–192.

28 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 190.

29 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 190. Songs can also be offered in order to bring a particular preaching to a conclusion, allowing someone else the opportunity to continue.

The predominant form of exposition is “largely grounded on the assumption that ‘a story well told is a story well interpreted’”. “This indigenous method of interpretation”, Dube continues, “capitalizes on recalling, narrating, and dramatizing the [biblical] story without explicitly defining what it means. Instead, the meaning is articulated by graphically bringing the story to life through a dramatic narration”.³⁰ Even those who lack a particular gift for dramatic representation recall and retell the story, “almost verbatim”. In every case, whether the performance is dramatic or pedantic, the nuances of interpretation are “to be read in the interjected songs and the repeated phrases”.³¹ Particular songs, inserted into the preachings, and particular repetitions constitute and contribute to the communal interpretation, contending for meaning for as long as it takes, often all night long during vigils and festivals, around the cyclical axis of corporate preaching.

Wilson Silgee’s account of *marabi* could be an account of a revival service or an all-night vigil, with a few modifications. Exchange ‘the Spirit’ for the alcoholic concoction and the Bible for the piano, and you have ordinary Africans trying to construct a theme or message from collaborative and corporate preaching.³²

The Sung Bible: The Cadences of Death

When the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard the testimonies of families who had ‘lost’ family members to the apartheid regime’s reign of terror, the constant cry of the families was for finding the bodies of those who had disappeared during apartheid so that they could be buried by the family with dignity. During apartheid funerals had become religio-cultural sites of socio-political contestation, one of the few ‘Black’ sites not substantially controlled by the apartheid state’s security forces, though they often hovered in the background in their armoured vehicles. And while Job 1:21, “The Lord gives, the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord”,

30 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 190.

31 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 190.

32 Although I cannot elaborate here, my own unfinished fieldwork among the BaThlaping of today, made possible by the respectful and resourceful fieldwork of Gopolang Moloabi (himself a member of the BaThlaping), resonates strongly with the interpretive patterns discerned by those cited. Moloabi’s transcripts of four revival/vigil-type services, amply demonstrate and document the interpretive devices detected in the work of those Africans whose work has been discussed above.

forms a part of most Christian funeral liturgies, this apparent acceptance of unacceptable death was often framed by the singing of the resisting lament “*Senzeni na?*” (What have we done?).

The form of the song has endured, but the content has adapted to the changing profile of African struggles.³³ “*Senzeni na?*” is a song of protest, but also a song of hope, yearning for a day when the oppression being resisted will be no more.³⁴ Since the 1950s the haunting sounds of this lament have been heard in South Africa, at funerals, mostly, but also in political marches and in formal church services.

Senzeni na? [What have we done?]
Sono sethu, ubumyama? [Our sin is that we are black?]
Sono sethu, yinyaniso? [Our sin is the truth?]
Sibulawayo! [We are being killed!]
Mayibuye iAfrica! [Let Africa return!]

In the 1980s this song could be heard almost daily, and definitely on Saturdays when the communities gathered to bury those murdered by the apartheid regime and their surrogates. Two decades after liberation the song is still sung. The terrain of struggle has shifted from political liberation to economic liberation, and the related struggle for deliverance from HIV and AIDS. Funerals are still the primary social location of this song. “*Senzeni na?*” [“What have we done?”].

In her analysis of the rhetoric of this song, Sisanda Nkoala notes, the first three lines of “*Senzeni na?*” “are posed as rhetorical questions, leading to the conclusion that part of the song’s efficacy lies in its approach of posing probing questions that are not meant to be answered, but rather are meant to evoke an internal response from the subconscious of those being questioned”.³⁵ The repetition of each line, often sung four times, reinforces the rhetorical

33 Madipoane Masenya, for example, argues that “it is pertinent”, given the position of women in post-apartheid South Africa “to add yet another line to the song”: “*Isono sethu ubulili bethu besifazane* (Our sin is our female sex?)”; Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele), Madipoane “An African-Conscious Female’s Reading of Steve Biko,” in *The Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological Challenges*. Edited by Cornel W. du Toit. Pretoria: Research Institute for Religion and Theology, 2008, 114–115.

34 Nkoala, “Songs That Shaped the Struggle: A Rhetorical Analysis of South African Struggle Songs,” in *Rhetoric of Statecraft in Africa* (ed. Salazar; *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*; Cape Town: AfricaRhetoric Publishing, 2013), 52.

35 Nkoala, “Songs That Shaped the Struggle,” 55.

stance of interrogation, inviting the singers to reflect both as individuals and corporately, for the song is always rendered en masse.

The fourth line of the song shifts from question to statement. While there may be debate about what Black people had done to deserve death, there is no debate about the death itself. The song concludes in the subjunctive mood: "*Mayibuye iAfrica*" / "Let Africa return". This line, according to Nkoala,

is a demand, and somewhat of an instruction, that based on the fact that there really was no logical answer to why black people were suffering, they now need to act to claim Africa back for Africans. It is as though it is compelling the singers that now that they have argued and proved the absurd nature of the injustices that they were being subjected to, they must work at reclaiming the Africa that they know and love, in order to restore it to its former glory and its original people. This is an important aspect of how the song manages to be persuasive because without a call to action, it would merely be a deliberation of what had happened, and not really a rhetorical text that persuades the audience to some form of action.³⁶

Nkoala's interpretation of the rhetorical import of this final line is feasible, anticipating that the answer to the questions of the first three lines is obvious:

What have we done? Nothing.
Is our sin that we are black? No.
Is our sin the truth? No.³⁷

However, Nkoala does not take into account the rhetorical tradition that frames (almost certainly) the song, for the song is derived from the Bible. The song is theological, and the primary interlocutor is God. The song is both a cry to God and a cry about God. The source of the song is the biblical book of Job and the biblical Psalms. Job provides the specificity of a direct interrogation of God, and the Psalms provide the more general rhetoric of both individual and communal lament:

Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.
What is man that you [God] magnify him,
and that you are concerned about him,

36 Nkoala, "Songs That Shaped the Struggle," 57.

37 Nkoala, "Songs That Shaped the Struggle," 57.

that you examine him every morning
and try him every moment?
Will you never turn your gaze away from me,
nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle?
Have I sinned? What have I done to you, O watcher of men?
Why have you set me as your target . . . (Job 7:16–20, NAS)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but I have no rest. (Psalm 22:1–2, NAS)

Awake, do not reject us forever.
Why do you hide your face
and forget our affliction and our oppression?
For our soul has sunk down into the dust;
our body cleaves to the earth.
Rise up, be our help,
and redeem us for the sake of your lovingkindness. (Psalm 44:23–26, NAS)

O God, you have rejected us.
You have broken us;
you have been angry;
O, restore us. (Psalm 60:1, NAS)

O God, restore us
and cause your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.
O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with the prayer of your people?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and you have made them to drink tears in large measure.
You make us an object of contention to our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.
O God of hosts, restore us
and cause your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. (Psalm 80:3–7, NAS)

Restore us, O God of our salvation,
and cause your indignation toward us to cease.
Will you be angry with us forever?

Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
 Will you not yourself revive us again,
 that your people may rejoice in you?
 Show us your lovingkindness, O Lord,
 and grant us your salvation. (Psalm 85:4–7, NAS)

This small sample of biblical resonances with the song *Senzeni na?*, of what is a substantial genre in the Bible, demonstrates the resources readily available to African Christians as they cry out to God for both a theological understanding of the injustice they experience and the justice they yearn for. Across the African continent, untimely and unjust death draws forth forms of resisting lament. There is the recognition that ‘somehow’ God is involved, for as Job says, “The Lord gives, the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord”. And yet, there is theological protest, “*Senzeni na?*”, drawing on the poetry of Job and the Psalms. And while this theological contestation is seldom overtly dealt with in African churches, African poets and artists are less restrained.

But there is also another interlocutor, besides God and besides other Black comrades. The song, “*Senzeni na?*”, is a protest against a biblically based apartheid theology. In advocating for apartheid (racial separation/segregation), the Afrikaner poet, Bible translator, and member of the Gereformeerde Kerk, J.D. du Toit claims that he has no single biblical text to show that apartheid is biblical: “I don’t have a text, but I have the Bible, the whole Bible. My argumentation would proceed from Genesis to Revelation”.³⁸ du Toit made this claim in 1944, in an address to the National People’s Congress (“Volkskongres”) on “Die Godsdiensstige Grondslag van ons Rassebeleid” [The Religious Foundation of our Race Policy].³⁹ As Robert Vosloo demonstrates, “The heart of Totius’ [as du Toit was known] argument for racial separation lies in his emphasis on the idea that what God has separated we should not put together”.

As the “great Divider”, God separates light and darkness, the dry land from the waters, the living creatures according to their kind. God created things not as a mixed mass, but as separated and segregated. Drawing on

38 Cited in and translated by Vosloo, “The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid in Reformed Circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Remarks,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015), 196; du Toit and du Toit, *Die Afrikaanse Rassebeleid En Die Skrif: Artikels Van Prof. Dr. J.D. Du Toit En Prof. Dr. S. Du Toit* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Bpk., 1995). See also Loubser, *A Critical Review of Racial Theology in South Africa: The Apartheid Bible* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987).

39 Vosloo, “The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid,” 196.

Acts 17:26, Totius admits that God created the nations out of one blood, but notes that this verse further states that God determined the boundaries of their territory. However, in Genesis 11 we read how the tower builders, drawing on their own wisdom and in resistance to God's command ("in hulle eiewysheid en verset"), did not want to trek any further, and wanted to remain one nation with one language. But, according to Totius, God again acts as the "Divider" ("Skeidingmaker") by creating a confusion of languages and dispersing the nations over the whole earth (Genesis 11:9). Therefore the nations should stand their ground ("hulleself handhaaf") against this Babylonian spirit of unification ("die Babiloniese gees van eenmaking"). For Totius, God willed the coming into being of the nations, but not the formation of empires (cf. Dan 7; Rev 17:13).⁴⁰

"Given this emphasis on the idea that God (as Divider) created the nations, Totius then goes on", Vosloo continues, "to challenge the idea of 'gelykstelling' (equalisation) between the races as defended by what he calls 'die humaniteitsmense' ('the humanist people'), with their references to texts such as Colossians 3:11 and Galatians 3:28". The point for Totius here, Vosloo argues, "is that the unity depicted in these texts refers to a spiritual unity in Christ in which distinctions and separations remain intact". It is this idea of "geen relykstelling", specifically "no equalising" of races, Vosloo demonstrates, that "stands out as the dominant motif in the discourse on race matters in South Africa" within white Afrikaner religio-cultural and political-economic formations. For example, in the Mission Policy of the Dutch Reformed Church of 1935 it is stated: "The Afrikaner's traditional fear of equalisation ('gelykstelling') between black and white was born from his aversion to the idea of racial mixing. The Church declares itself straightforwardly opposed to this mixing and to everything that promotes it ...".⁴¹

A closely related motif within du Toit's speech to the "Volkskongres", argues Vosloo, is of the role of the white Afrikaner as that of "Christian guardianship" ("Christelike voogdyskap"), "another central motif in the discourse on race in South Africa in the 1940s"; in the words of du Toit, white South Africans are "to nurture the native in his coming of age" as part of the calling of the "wonderful God who guided our fathers as torch bearers for black Africa".⁴² In the words of the "Volkskongres" in 1944, it was decided: "That it is to the benefit of whites as well as blacks that a policy of apartheid be followed ... And that it is the duty

40 Vosloo, "The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid," 196–197.

41 Vosloo, "The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid," 197–198.

42 Vosloo, "The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid," 199.

of the whites to act as guardians over the black races . . . And that in the best interest of all races there shall be no further mixing of blood".⁴³

"*Senzeni na?*" is a form of theological contestation, arising alongside this emerging theology of apartheid, resisting it through to its destruction, and using the same Bible as a resource. And among the resources the Bible offered, the Black masses drew on the biblical tradition of lament to ask of God, themselves, and their oppressors, "*Senzeni na?*"

Mbuli's Bible: Re-citing the Bible

Friday Mavuso, special tribute to the late President of the DPSA—the Disabled People of South Africa—died June 1995, car accident.

When he died I wished I could stage a sit-in in heaven./ *Magundulela ngubani oyohaya inkondlo ngawe?* [Magundulela, who will compose a poem about you?]/ *Yini eyakungenza ngikuhloniphe ukufa na?* [Why should I respect death?]/ Lord my God I do not understand./ Pardon me, I am ignorant./ Here I stand in search of thy wisdom./ Is death an idiom, or is death an idiot?/ Lord my God, I do not understand.

When are you on duty, and when are you on leave?/ Is there a holiday in heaven or not?/ Few years ago tragedy deprived us of two great talents./ In one week you took away Arthur—'Fighting Prince'—Mayisela and Paul Ndlovu the singer./ Again, death deprived us of two great talents, legends, Friday Mavuso and Harry Gwala, both paralysed.

Lord my God, I do not understand./ Punish me not, for I am ignorant./ Is there a new commandment?/ "Thou shall suffer perpetually"/ "Thou shall die more than other races"?/ Now I understand why other nations weep when the child is born.

Lord my God, do you care about the poor?/ Why then remove the shepherd from the sheep?/ Is there a hidden prophecy about the plight of the black people?/ Is there a curse bestowed upon us?/ *Senzeni thina sizwe esimnyama?* [What have we black people done?]/ Was the bullet that riddled Friday's spinal cord not enough?/ Why did you remove Friday Mavuso and leave Barend Strydom alone?/ I repeat, why did you remove Friday Mavuso and leave Barend Strydom alone?

43 Vosloo, "The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid," 200.

Lord my God, I cannot fax nor telephone you, but to continue with my provocative poetry .../ Why are there so many more funerals than weddings?/ Do you know that our graves are overcrowded?/ Is death an idiom, or death an idiot?

Lord my God, why allow people with unfinished projects to enter your kingdom?/ When Friday Mavuso finally enters thy kingdom, honour him with a noble crown./ When he enters thy kingdom, ask him who should look after his sheep./ When he enters thy kingdom, ask him what should we do with his wheelchair./ When he enters thy kingdom, tell him I say his departure was too early and too soon for heaven, too soon for burial.⁴⁴

Mzwakhe Mbuli is known in South Africa as the ‘People’s Poet’, for his songs and poetry have long articulated the inchoate embodied experiences of millions of Black South Africans struggling for liberation. Born in Sophia Town, Johannesburg, in the late 1950s (1959), Mbuli was formed by the Black struggle against apartheid, forging his poetry in the aftermath of the student uprising in Soweto in 1976. His 1986 album “Change is Pain” was banned, and Mbuli spent most of 1988 in detention.⁴⁵ But he continued to use his “provocative poetry” as a resource in the liberation struggle against apartheid and in various post-liberation struggles.

Mbuli’s body of work has been and continues to be shaped by the contours of the Black struggle in South Africa, as well as by the Bible and his Christian faith. In the context of HIV and AIDS his song “Song of the Spirit”, from the album “KwaZulu-Natal”, continues the prophetic tradition in South African society, demonstrating that it is legitimate to talk back to power, including God. The immediate context of this song are the untimely deaths of many Black activists (Friday Mavuso, Arthur Mayisela, Paul Ndlovu, and Harry Gwala), and the amnesty granted to Barend Strydom, a white racist murderer, by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The wider context, as other tracks on the music album indicate, is the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The lines that ask, “Why are there so many more funerals than weddings?/ Do you know that our graves are overcrowded?” are a direct allusion to this reality of African lives. Africans attend funerals every weekend, but hardly ever a wedding. Economic concerns and associated concerns about crime and violence also lurk in the background, including the devastation

44 Mbuli, “Song of the Spirit,” in *Kwazulu-Natal* (MZ Music, 1996). The song is used here with the permission of Mzwakhe Mbuli.

45 <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/mzwakhe-mbuli>.

wrought by global neo-liberal capitalism and African neo-colonial governments' macro-economic buy-in to capitalism and its effects on African contexts, including systemic poverty, unemployment, and inequality. But HIV and AIDS are at the forefront, and this song is a lament about specific named untimely deaths and untimely deaths in general. Indeed, Mbuli interrogates the notion defended by the 'wise' that death is an "idiom", a form of wisdom directed by God to discipline God's people. This is the 'wisdom' of Job's friends and of the churches in South Africa. Instead, Mbuli, suggests, perhaps we should consider death as an "idiot", a force to be resisted. "Why", Mbuli asks, "should I respect death" when death deprives us of our leaders yet leaves us with racists? Surely death is an idiot?

The rhetoric that shapes Mbuli's poem is the rhetoric of the Job character in the book of Job. There is a relentless, respectful-disrespectful questioning of God. Mbuli's lament is resisting discourse, as the many allusions to 'struggle' tactics so familiar to millions of South Africa remind us. Mbuli wonders if struggle tactics like sit-ins would work in heaven. He acknowledges his ignorance, showing deference (*hlonipha*) to the divine, but goes on to ask whether an eleventh commandment has been added to the list he knows so well. He worries that God is racist, punishing Blacks disproportionately. "*Senzeni na?*" Like Job, he longs for more immediate contact with God. And he ends his song by giving God instructions about how to behave in God's own context, heaven. Surely, Mbuli seems to be saying, even if God cannot intervene more justly on earth, God must be able to act justly in heaven.

Throughout the song the interrogative mood is used. Here, unfortunately, unlike in the book of Job (but as in Psalm 44), God does not appear and does not answer. But the funerary liturgical acceptance of untimely death is contested, and the lamenting questioning of God has been affirmed and given legitimacy both by re-memembering other biblical trajectories (the poetry of Job and the Psalms) and by Mbuli's "provocative poetry". Untimely, "too soon", death is re-memembered.

The HIV Bible: The Wages of Sin and a Word of Hope

The book of Job has played a part in giving voice to the local, lived, and embodied theologies of people in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, over a period of nearly twenty years. "*Senzeni na?*", has been sung since the 1950s, was sung at too many 'political' funerals in the 1970s and 1980s as the apartheid regime tried to reassert its flailing grip on power, and is still sung after more than twenty years of liberation. The terrain of struggle has shifted from political liberation to economic liberation, and the related struggle for deliverance

from HIV and AIDS. Funerals are still the primary social location of this song. “*Senzeni na?*/What have we done?” And while South Africa’s champion of the African renaissance, Thabo Mbeki, South African President from 14 June 1999 to 24 September 2008, bears some responsibility for both the escalating rates of HIV-related deaths and unemployment, Christian theology (and religion in general) has played a prominent complicit part too.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, more than thirty years after having been identified, HIV and even AIDS remain among us, particularly in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, the epicentre of the epidemic world-wide.⁴⁷ “*Senzeni na?*” continues to be an appropriate refrain. But it is not the only embodied discourse of those living with HIV. Besides its regular appearance at funerals, the book of Job has not featured that much in South African popular culture nor in African biblical scholarship.⁴⁸ But the advent of HIV and its associated disease, AIDS, has recovered the neglected poetry of Job.⁴⁹

In its work with people living with HIV, who are overt about their HIV-positive status, the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and

46 Haddad ed, *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).

47 HSRC, “South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey, 2012,” (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2014).

48 For the latter see Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967–2000* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), LeMarquand, “A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).

49 See for example Matadi, *Suffering, Belief, Hope: The Wisdom of Job for an AIDS-Stricken Africa* (trans. Newman and Czerny; Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007); Adeso, “Suffering in Job and in an African Perspective: Exegesis of Job 42:1–6,” in *Sagesse Humaine Et Sagesse Divine Dans La Bible/Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom in the Bible* (ed. Bulembat; Nairobi: Pan African Association of Catholic Exegetes, 2005); Nadar, “‘Barak God and Die!’ Women, HIV and a Theology of Suffering,” in *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible* (eds. Dube and Kanyoro; Pietermaritzburg/Maryknoll: Cluster Publications/Orbis Books, 2004); Wittenberg, “Counselling AIDS Patients: Job as a Paradigm,” in *Reflecting Theologically on AIDS: A Global Challenge* (ed. Gill; London: SCM Press, 2007); Gitay, “Rhetoric and Its Limitations: Job the Dissident x,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 29, no. 2 (2003); Masenya, “Between Unjust Suffering and the ‘Silent’ God: Job and the HIV/AIDS Sufferers in South Africa,” *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (2001); Nadar, “Re-Reading Job in the Midst of Suffering in the HIV/AIDS Era: How Not to Talk of God,” *Old Testament Essays* 16, no. 2 (2003); van Dyk, “The Tale of Two Tragedies: The Book of Job and HIV/AIDS in Africa,” *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa* 16 (2004); West, “Sacred Texts, Particularly the Bible and the Qur’an, and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Textual Territory,” in *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain* (ed. Haddad; Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).

Research, located in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, has turned to the book of Job, and in so doing has returned the poetry of Job to those on the margins of the church. Using the collaborative methodology of “Contextual Bible Study”, the Ujamaa Centre works with the *Siyaphila* community-based support network of people living with HIV and AIDS. The primary aim of this partnership has been to journey with people living with HIV and AIDS, from diagnosis until death with dignity in the early years, and then with the roll-out of antiretroviral treatment from diagnosis to a life full of dignity and resilience. Commenting on the formation of the *Siyaphila* support group network, Bongi Zengele, who worked with the Ujamaa Centre during the early years of the pandemic, characterises the work as follows: “The main goal is to facilitate the development of sustainable community-based support groups, which would provide support and enhance motivation and encouragement to people living with HIV/AIDS as they struggle towards positive living, by enabling them to reach out to their communities, spreading the message of hope and life in spite of being HIV-positive”.⁵⁰ The collaborative project also aims to train trainers from among the support group members and to develop a basic legal ‘literacy’ within the group “thus empowering the support groups to know and safeguard their basic rights, which are normally violated”.⁵¹ Among the core concerns that constitute the support groups are: knowledge about HIV/AIDS, dealing with one’s HIV-positive status, support of family and friends, medical support and healthy nutrition, sexuality and relationships, spiritual care, job creation, counselling, and local church support.⁵²

Word of mouth brings people to the *Siyaphila* support groups, of which there are now many across the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and further afield. The objectives of the groups are to break the silence surrounding HIV and AIDS, to proclaim that there is life and dignity after the death of being diagnosed as HIV-positive, and to journey in solidarity with other people living positively with HIV and AIDS. And Contextual Bible Study is one resource in working towards these objectives. The unrelenting stigma of being HIV-positive in South Africa—where the prevailing response from families, the churches, and local communities is a wary silence and where, when the silence is broken, it is only by the condemnatory preaching of church pastors—damages and

50 Stooss, “Spreading Hope within the Outcasts of Society: How Contextual Bible Study Can Make a Powerful Contribution to the Struggle against HIV/AIDS and Possible Consequences for the Swiss Context” (Honours, University of Natal, 2002) 41; West, “Reading the Bible in the Light of HIV/AIDS in South Africa,” *The Ecumenical Review* 55, no. 4 (2003).

51 Stooss, “Spreading Hope within the Outcasts of Society,” 42.

52 Stooss, “Spreading Hope within the Outcasts of Society,” 42.

destroys the fragile human dignity of people often already debilitated by the ravages of our government's complicity with global capitalism and their criminally tardy antiretroviral treatment campaign.

"I would rather come to Bible Study than go to church," they say. Going to church for many young people who are HIV-positive means being preached about, preached at, and preached against. Coming to Contextual Bible Study in a *Siyaphila* support group enables those struggling to live positively with HIV to find a different theological perspective and to encounter a different Bible, a contested Bible, but one that resuscitates dignity, builds resilience, and affirms the presence of God among those living positively.

The early Contextual Bible Study work, in the late 1990s, focussed on biblical texts from the New Testament gospels which affirmed the solidarity of God and Jesus with those on the margins of first century society. By an analogy of struggle and of method, Contextual Bible Study forged lines of connection between these 'biblical' sites of contestation and those who are HIV-positive, contending with the condemnatory stigmatisation of society in general and religious institutions in particular.⁵³ More recently, the Contextual Bible Study work has slowly extended into the book of Job in the last decade and a half.

Too many funerals, and too much of Job 1:21, prompted the decision to begin doing Contextual Bible Study work on the book of Job, reading beyond the prose prologue and on into the poetry of Job 3,⁵⁴ where we encountered a less theologically compliant Job. With the poet Mzwakhe Mbuli we have wondered: "Why are there so many more funerals than weddings?/ Do you [God] know that our graves are overcrowded?" Trusting in the solidarity of God, we have had the courage to ask hard questions, even at the time when many of those participating in support groups would die. More recently, experiencing in our bodies the life-giving effects of antiretroviral treatment, we have had the wonderful luxury of time—to lament and to live.⁵⁵ Like Job we have turned to interrogate God.

After one too many funerals and one too many liturgical recitations of Job 1:21, being attentive to 'the signs of our times', Bongi Zengele, who co-ordinated the Ujamaa Centre's HIV and AIDS work, facilitated a Contextual Bible Study with a local *Siyaphila* support group on Job 3, inviting Gerald West, an African

53 West, "Reading the Bible in the Light of HIV/AIDS in South Africa."

54 West and Zengele, "Reading Job 'Positively' in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa," *Concilium* 4 (2004).

55 West, "The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (eds. Lee and Mandolfo; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

biblical scholar who works with the Ujamaa Centre, to co-facilitate the process with her.

As we explored Job 3 together in that Contextual Bible Study, a young man, one of the few men at that time to participate in a *Siyaphila* (We are alive/well) group,⁵⁶ voiced his despair, declaring that he knew exactly how Job felt, fantasizing about his death.

Let the day perish on which I was to be born, And the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.'

May that day be darkness; let not God above care for it, nor light shine on it.

Let darkness and black gloom claim it; let a cloud settle on it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.

As for that night, let darkness seize it; let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months.

Behold, let that night be barren; let no joyful shout enter it (Job 3:3–7, NAS).

Trembling with emotion, he told us how he had had to fight the desire to take his own life after he was diagnosed as HIV-positive. He had managed, he continued, to live 'positively', drawing deeply on the support of the *Siyaphila* network. But, he declared, turning directly to the facilitators, our reading of Job 3 on this day had reignited the smouldering desire for death. Why should he not, he asked, take his own life. In the midst of his revived trauma we paused, not knowing quite how to respond. But a response was demanded and so we tentatively turned back to the biblical text saying that though Job, like him, had fantasised about his own death, using an array of images (which the group had already identified), Job had not contemplated taking his own life. He had directed, instead, his desire for death towards God, imagining the many ways in which God might have brought about his death at birth (3:3–19) or before he had experienced his current troubles (3:20–26). Though he continued to lament about his life in chapter three and in his other speeches, we said, he seemed to accept that his life was in God's hands.

Remarkably, our (re)turn to the biblical text, much of which was unfamiliar until then, seemed to satisfy the young man, and he nodded and sat amongst us again. We then continued, on past Job's resisting lament in the poetry to the prose epilogue, endeavouring to re-member the whole story. We briefly

56 See West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word: What People Living with HIV and AIDS Want (and Get) from the Bible," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 (2006): 62–63.

summarised the poetic narrative through to the end, recounting how Job refused to restrain his resisting lament in the face of his friends' arguments (through each of his poetic cycles speeches) and how Job even refused to retract his lament when finally face-to-face with God (38–42:6). We then continued into the prose epilogue, reading aloud together how God rebuked Job's friends for not "speaking of me [God] what is right", but commending Job for 'having spoken of/to God what is right' (42:7, 8).

Others in the support group now rejoined the discussion, sharing their own doubt, fear, and despair. Some time later, after nearly three hours together, Bongi Zengele brought our time together to a conclusion, inviting us to breathe deeply in unison and to pray for one another. Flowing from this liturgical moment, what might be called a spirituality of liberation,⁵⁷ she then invited us to write, each in our own language, our own version of Job 3. Quietly, each of the participants found their own space in the room, took up the paper and pens provided, and attempted to write what was embodied and as yet only partially expressed.

We then asked the support group if they would be willing to share what they had written with others outside of the group. They were unanimous, making it clear that what they had written must be shared with others. Just as Job 3 expressed Job's struggle with disease and discrimination, so too what they had written expressed their reality, and they wanted this reality to be heard and understood by their families, churches, and communities—in that order. They made it clear too that they wanted their names to be associated with what they had expressed, but without a particular name being associated with a particular personal lament. We have honoured their wishes, making known what is not known, hoping that others will find the courage to lament likewise and that those who must hear would hear.⁵⁸

This workshop affirmed the importance of returning lament to the lives of those whose churches insist on the retributive theological trajectory of Job's friends.⁵⁹ Recognising that we had touched something significant among the *Siyaphila* members we continued our work on the book of Job, constructing

57 Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006).

58 The *Siyaphila* laments can be found in West, "The Poetry of Job as a Resource in the Context of HIV."

59 See also Stone, "Safer Text: Reading Biblical Laments in the Age of AIDS," *Theology and Sexuality* 10 (1999); West, "The Gift of Voice, the Gift of Tears: A Queer Reading of Lamentations in the Context of AIDS," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Stone; Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001).

another Contextual Bible Study around lament using Job 19 and so going deeper in to the poetry:

Then Job responded,
“How long will you torment me and crush me with words?
These ten times you have insulted me; you are not ashamed to wrong me.
Even if I have truly erred, my error lodges with me.
If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me and prove my disgrace to me,
know then that God has wronged me and has closed His net around me.
Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is
no justice.
He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and he has put darkness
on my paths.
He has stripped my honor from me and removed the crown from my
head.
He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; and he has uprooted
my hope like a tree.
He has also kindled his anger against me and considered me as his enemy.
His troops come together, and build up their way against me and camp
around my tent.
He has removed my brothers far from me, and my acquaintances are
completely estranged from me.
My relatives have failed, and my intimate friends have forgotten me.
Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a stranger. I am a
foreigner in their sight.
I call to my servant, but he does not answer; I have to implore him with
my mouth.
My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own
brothers.
Even young children despise me; I rise up and they speak against me.
All my associates abhor me, and those I love have turned against me.
My bone clings to my skin and my flesh, and I have escaped only by the
skin of my teeth.
Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me.
Why do you persecute me as God does, and are not satisfied with my
flesh?
Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
That with an iron stylus and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!”
(Job 19:1–24, NAS)

We chose this text for a number of reasons. Briefly, we chose it because it is Job's sixth speech, demonstrating that Job's lament is a sustained discourse, not a momentary and aberrant form of expression. Second, this speech (Job 19:1–29) summarises Job's complaint against his friends (2–6, 21–22, 28–29). And third, this speech summarises Job's indirect, reflective-reflexive attitude towards God (without addressing God directly) (7–20, 23–27).⁶⁰ We decided to exclude verses 25–29 because these verses of chapter 19 have a strong reception history in the churches, where they are read Christologically. We bracketed them because Contextual Bible Study reads these verses in continuity with the literary character of the Job we had come to know through his speeches, and not as the churches have come to interpret them.⁶¹ In verses 25–29 Job is not trusting in some external (Christological) agent to vindicate him; his desire is that his own spoken words, his own lamenting oral argument, should be “inscribed in a book” or “engraved in the rock”, so that this testimony would continue to represent him before God, even if/when he was no longer able. His orally articulated reality is his testimony. Because the Ujamaa Centre wanted this Contextual Bible Study to stay focussed on the internal logic of the book of Job, rather than the churches reception history of verses 25–29, we left these verses out, lest they deflect from the thrust of Job's poetic argument. Ending with verse 24, with its references to the writing down of what had been orally articulated was a way too of re-memembering the final ritual of the previous Contextual Bible Study on Job 3 when together we had written down what was embodied within each of us.

As *Siyaphila* participants engaged, in small groups, with this Contextual Bible Study on Job 19, it became readily apparent to them that Job was not as accepting of his suffering as they re-memembered from too many funeral liturgies. Indeed, 19:1–24 offered them a clear sense of Job's refusal to accept both the perspective of the friends and what God was doing to him. They were truly amazed by how Job spoke to his friends and by how he talked to himself about God (verse 6–20). But what was most significant for them was Job's cry to his friends not to stigmatise him.

What the Ujamaa Centre learned from the *Siyaphila* support groups through these Contextual Bible Studies was that stigmatisation by their families, their churches, and their communities was the primary ‘struggle’ they faced. How to talk of/to God was an important but secondary ‘struggle’. So we began to reflect on how we might re-engage with their first fear and primary struggle. From our work on Job 3, and the narrative connection we re-memembered between

60 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 1–20* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 435.

61 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 1–20*, 457–358.

chapter 3 and the final chapter, chapter 42, particularly Job 42:7, we seemed to have found a significant resource, one that might be a pivotal theological point for those who are HIV-positive, attempting to live positively in a context where the dominant theology is strongly retributive.⁶²

Once again we decided to bracket those verses that might have deflected our focus on 42:7, and so we did not include Job 42:1–6. While in verses 1–6 Job seems to reconsider his resisting and protesting stance towards God, we did not think that Job repents, recants, or retracts in his concluding speech (42:1–6),⁶³ a prevalent position within Christian receptions of this final chapter. Notwithstanding the syntactic and semantic complexities of these verses,⁶⁴ we could not imagine the lamenting, protesting, and resisting Job we had come to know in the poetry reacting in these ways to God's responses (38–41).⁶⁵ Job is never in any doubt that God is in control or that God is powerful; indeed, he has experienced in his body the effects of God's control and power. What Job does not understand is the logic of God's control or justice of God's exercise of power.⁶⁶ Job may 'back off', deferring to God's power, but Job, we were sure, did not repent, recant, or retract.

David Clines concurs, arguing that in Job's first speech within the divine speeches (40:3–5), Job "does not withdraw a word he has said, he does not admit that God is in the right or that he is in the wrong, he does not confess to any sins or apologize for what he has said".⁶⁷ Crucially, for Clines, it is only in the legal sense that Job "submits". He formally withdraws the formal lawsuit he has lodged in the various installments of his poetic lament against his

62 West, "Sacred Texts and HIV and AIDS."

63 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 38–42* (18 B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1218–1224. But see Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the 'Happy Ending' in Job 42:7–17* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 55, 128; Pyeon, *You Have Not Spoken What Is Right about Me: Intertextuality and the Book of Job* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 22–23; Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 86–87.

64 van Wolde, "Job 42,1–6: The Reversal of Job," in *The Book of Job* (ed. Beuken; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994).

65 David Clines encourages the reader not to read the difficult parts of the poetry in ways that are not 'in character' for Job; see Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 1–20*. See also Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 236; Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 257.

66 Birch, et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 404–406.

67 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 38–42*, 1212.

friends and Yahweh. Since, Clines continues, “he has done no wrong, he cannot ‘repent’, but having been in mourning he now brings the period of mourning to an end by ‘accepting consolation’, for his lost children as well as for the loss of his honor, a consolation that is being offered to him both from the friends and (in his own way) from Yahweh”.⁶⁸

According to Clines, Job “acknowledges the omnipotence of Yahweh (v2)”, “he accepts that he has intruded into the area of ‘marvels’, in which he has no competence (v3b)”, and “now that he has heard the utterances Yahweh has addressed personally to him (v5), he abandons his suit against God (v6a) together with his mourning and he intends to resume his normal life (v6b)”.⁶⁹ While the Ujamaa Centre concurred with the second and third points, we wondered about the first. In our reading of the God speeches, we wondered whether God is not only exploring the limits of Job’s (and so humanity’s) power, but also the limits of God’s own power. Perhaps the God speeches, particularly the discourses on Behemoth (40:15–24) and Leviathan (41:1–34), acknowledge the problem of the limits of God’s power, with God summoning Job, implicitly, to collaborate with God in the unfinished business of bringing about justice-order.⁷⁰ Given that Job quotes, in an adapted form (42:2b), from Genesis 11:6, and that this text rejects the hubris of human power,⁷¹ perhaps these same words in Job’s mouth question God’s power. The God speeches, we concluded, were a call to Job to join God in the ongoing and incomplete work of redemption.

Having bracketed verses 1–6, we chose to base the Contextual Bible Study on Job 42:7–11.

It came about after the Lord [Yahweh] had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.” So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job. The Lord

68 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 38–42*, 1218.

69 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 38–42*, 1212.

70 There are hints of this in Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 226, 232.

71 Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 234.

restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold. Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold (Job 42:7–11, NAS).

The shift from verses 6 to 7 is substantial,⁷² for we leave the private domain and enter the public domain. The *Siyaphila* participants noticed this shift. First, God, in front of Job's friends, takes sides with Job. Second, God then involves the whole community, by calling upon the friends to perform a public ritual, for which they are required to obtain resources—cattle, sheep, fire, knives—from Job's local community. Having in this manner drawn Job's community into the discourse, God then has Job praying, publically, for his friends, who in their folly have not, God repeats, spoken of/to God what is right (42:8). We imagined an audience of those who have stigmatised and withdrawn from Job listening and watching as God takes sides with Job. They then become participants, contributing to and so becoming implicated in the ritual that redeems the friends (and themselves) and reintegrates Job into his/their community.

Contextual Bible Study locates itself, in brief, in the nexus of exegesis and appropriation.⁷³ Our context compels us to search the biblical text for potential resources, and the biblical text offers potential lines of connection with our context. The starting point can be either, but the dialogical movement between them is essential to the process, which is always cyclical. Having been prompted by the questions and responses of the *Siyaphila* group to our Contextual Bible Studies on Job 3 and Job 19, we re-turned to Job 42, to read it more carefully and fully.

The first moment of Job's restoration is the clarity of God's identification with Job. God not only affirms Job as "my servant" (v7a), God goes further, affirming both what and how Job has spoken of and to God (v7b). We do not know precisely which speeches God is referring to here; Job has spoken a great deal! But perhaps this is the point, perhaps God is affirming the diversity of Job's engagements. Perhaps God is affirming both the moments of acceptance (1:21) and the many moments of doubt and questioning (beginning in chapter 3). God affirms, perhaps, that it is legitimate for Job (and us) to both

72 Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the 'Happy Ending' in Job 42:7–17*; Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 38–42*, 1230.

73 West, "Exegesis Seeking Appropriation; Appropriation Seeking Exegesis: Re-Reading 2 Samuel 12:1–22 in Search of Redemptive Masculinities," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 2 (2013).

accept and doubt God's ways. It is acceptable, it would seem from God's affirmation of Job, to castigate and interrogate God, to lament about and to God.

God's next move is as remarkable as God's first. Having affirmed Job, God rebukes the friends. If we are surprised by God's affirmation of Job, we are as surprised by God's rebuke of the friends. For the friends have spoken about God in the traditional way, insisting that Job has done something to deserve his suffering. But God stands with Job and against Job's friends. God is not neutral. The second moment is one of God taking sides with a minority theological position.

Indeed, God goes further, invoking a third moment by involving Job in the restoration of his friends. God 'returns' to Job some of agency he has lost in the face of the stigmatisation of his friends and community. Job had regularly lamented his loss of subjectivity in his speeches; God now returns to him his agency.

This moment leads into a fourth moment of restoration, as those who had been primarily responsible for stigmatising Job are required, by God, to formally and publically acknowledge their "folly". The public dimension is vital. God requires that the friends not only come to Job for prayer, but that they participate in a public ritual. God is specific, they must take "seven bulls and seven rams", a substantial number, for in Ezekiel 45:23 this same number is offered for the whole people of Israel; and in the other cases in the Old Testament where seven bulls and seven rams are offered (Numbers 23:1, 29; 1 Chronicles 15:26; 2 Chronicles 29:21) "the stakes are much higher than they are in the case of Job's friends".⁷⁴ But perhaps the stakes are high here precisely because theological certainty of the friends' sort is seriously dangerous. God feels misrepresented by the friends, and such is the extent of their misrepresentation that God draws Job in to deal with the matter with God. If our reading of verse 6 is feasible, then God has taken Job up on his willingness to be a co-worker with God. Job is, in every sense, God's "servant".

We noted too that the large numbers of animals required serves another important function. It is a reminder of what Job has 'lost' in chapter 1,⁷⁵ and points the reader/hearer to another dimension of Job's restoration. By requiring the friends to find the animals demanded by God, the friends, who come from afar, are required to move into Job's community and to purchase animals from them. This ritual act is a fifth moment in Job's restoration, for it draws the estranged community back towards the Job they have stigmatised and rejected. In this moment their participation is indirect, but it is nevertheless a form of participation in the restoration of Job.

74 Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job* 38–42, 1232.

75 In fact Job's cattle are 'taken' by a raiding band (Job 1:14). We have yet to explore this connection with the 'taking' of African cattle.

This brought us to what was for many of the participants the most significant moment since God had taken a clear stance with Job over against the religious position of Job's friends. What would happen, we wondered, when Job's community witnessed God's affirmation of Job and the friends' acknowledgment of their theological folly? What would happen when the community was drawn, indirectly, into a renewed relationship with Job? We found the answer in 42:11, a verse that most participants could not remember having heard before. In 42:11 the restoration of Job is not miraculous or magical (though verse 10 is usually re-membered as the end of the sub-unit, not verse 11), but involves the acceptance and support of the whole community.⁷⁶ The sixth moment of Job's restoration is the restoration of a stigmatised Job to his community by his community. The focus for participants was not the apparently miraculous ending of verse 10, as is so often the case in most appropriations of the book of Job by the churches, but the ordinary community-oriented restoration of verse 11. For here we learn *how* God restores the fortunes of Job.

Job's restoration to his community includes several steps, according to the slow repetitive syntactic movement of the text. The community takes the initiative and comes to him. The community re-incorporates him by eating with him. The community identifies themselves with him. The community comforts him. The community shifts their theological frame. Each member of the community makes an economic contribution to his recovery. The narrator signals the fundamental significance of the change in the community at the outset: "Those who had known him before", the very same people who had stigmatised and shunned him (12:4; 16:10, 20–21; 17:1–16; 19:13–21; 29:1–30:15), now "came to him" (v11). The shift is both theological and social. The shape of the text here shows the ordering of these shifts. As the community comes to grips with another theological perspective, so they are enabled to become a different kind of community. The biblical text is clear: there is another, contending, theological perspective to that of the friends. The theological frame within which they have lived has been shown to be just one theological perspective, not *the* theological perspective.⁷⁷ The dominant, normative, theological tradition cannot account for important dimensions of lived reality/experience.

The restoration of Job is social in the fullest sense. Just as theological perspectives shape social stigma, so theological perspectives shape social acceptance. Job is embraced for who he is. While his own personal journey with stigma has reconstituted him, teaching him things he could not have known

76 For other aspects of this communal dimension see Ngwa, *The Hermeneutics of the 'Happy Ending' in Job 42:7–17*, 22, 97.

77 We find a similar contestation in the book of Judith; see Efthimiadis-Keith, "Genealogy, Retribution and Identity: Re-Interpreting the Cause of Suffering in the Book of Judith," *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 3 (2014).

otherwise,⁷⁸ in another sense he is the same person he was at the beginning. His community rejected this Job and now accepts this Job.

We dwelt for some time on the emphasis of the biblical text on economic restoration. Stigma, the text teaches us, has economic effects. Stigma has forced Job into a world where Sheol is his home, the Pit is his father, and the worm his mother and sister (Job 17:11–16). It is a world where dust and ashes are the reality, psychologically and economically. That the community who pushed him into this world should be the community who enables the restoration of his economic well-being is just. “A person is a person because of other people” is the core value of African society, and yet the stigma associated with HIV (and disability and unemployment)⁷⁹ has eaten away at us, devouring our communities.⁸⁰ But if God is for us, who can be against us? If it is clear to the families of those who are HIV-positive that God stands with the infected, how can the family cast/e them out?

Another outcome of our work together was the reconnecting of HIV-positive people and their Bibles. Over the years we have worked together there has been informal and formal reflection on how *Siyaphila* support group members apprehend the Bible. The dominant metaphor used to describe the experience of most members of the Bible prior to their joining in with the *Siyaphila* support group Contextual Bible Studies was one of distance. The Bible was afar off, at a distance from them.⁸¹ Related to this image of distance was the image of place. The Bible was located in particular places, in the homes of their parents and grandparents, but predominantly in the church. As one person expressed it, the Bible “was opened and closed in church.”⁸² Yet another related image

78 Tamez, “A Letter to Job,” in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World* (eds. Pobee and von Wartenberg-Potter; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).

79 Kamba, “Developing a Holistic Educational Programme through Contextual Bible Study with People with Disabilities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo: Iman’enda as a Case Study” (PhD, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013); Gwala, “The Impact of Unemployment on the Youth of Pietermaritzburg” (Master of Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2007).

80 The language of ‘eating’ is deliberate, for the common understanding of ‘witchcraft’ in African communities is that of being ‘eaten’; see Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 142–143; Balcomb, “Sex, Sorcery, and Stigma: Probing Some No-Go Areas of the Denial Syndrome in the AIDS Debate,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 (2006); Behrend, “The Rise of Occult Powers, AIDS and the Roman Catholic Church in Western Uganda,” *Journal of Religion in Africa—Religion en Afrique* 37, no. 1 (2007).

81 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 57.

82 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 57.

used was that of partial belonging; the Bible belonged to others. For most, the Bible belonged to the minister/pastor/priest. For some the Bible had some sense of belonging in their homes, usually with a parent or grandparent. But even in these few cases, the Bible belonged predominantly in the hands of the professionals.⁸³

Another related image used of the Bible prior to their participation in the *Siyaphila* support groups was that of its relative silence. As one member put it, the Bible required a preacher to make it speak. What she wanted to convey in saying this was that the Bible was a holy book and could therefore only be made to speak by those whose task it was to do so.⁸⁴ As another person put it, it was a book 'handled' by others. In fact, this person reported that she had been expressly forbidden to touch the Bible because she was HIV-positive and therefore unclean. Only holy people should handle the Bible. And when the Bible was handled by such people it was used to address them, the HIV-positive, directly, as the word of God over against them.⁸⁵

There was also general agreement that the Bible was not about ordinary life, let alone about their predicaments. As one said, the Bible "is just a book, talking about things that do not touch me". She was not permitted, she felt, to bring her questions or her reality to the Bible. It was 'about' other things, holy things unrelated to her context.⁸⁶

All of these predominantly negative associations with the Bible had been altered by their membership of the *Siyaphila* support group. What was far from them had come close to them; what had no place with them now had a place with them; what belonged to others now belonged to them; what had nothing relevant to say to them now spoke directly to their condition; what could not be touched or made to speak by them or for them was now in their hands, they could ask their questions of it, and they heard it speaking to them directly; what had brought judgment, stigma, and discrimination now brought healing, hope, and life.⁸⁷

The Bible was no longer far off. It engaged them personally and as a group, and dealt with the daily concerns that constituted their lives. As one person said, it affirmed that she was made in the image of God and offered her support in her inner struggles.⁸⁸ The Bible belonged in a new way. As another person put it, now that she actually owned a Bible, she was aware of how much the

83 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 57.

84 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 57.

85 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 57.

86 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 57–58.

87 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 58.

88 West and Zengele, "The Medicine of God's Word," 58.

Bible was used selectively in church by the church leadership. She now understood the wider literary and socio-historical context of the Bible.⁸⁹

One of the most startling changes was that the *Siyaphila* members had come to see that the Bible dealt with real life issues. They had been amazed to discover that the things that were happening in their contexts were “in the Bible”. The many connections between their lives and the Bible astounded them.⁹⁰ Closely related to this new understanding was their sense of control. Through the participatory Contextual Bible Study processes they had realised that they did not need anyone else to interpret the Bible for them; they could interpret for themselves. Another aspect of this control was the sense that they could interrogate the Bible. As one member put it, drawing on her experience of the Job Bible studies, the Bible itself gave you permission to ask hard questions of the Bible and even God. This was especially empowering, she continued, for it enabled her to talk back to those who used the Bible to say that HIV is a punishment for sin. She could now affirm that God loved her and she could now contest the interpretation of the Bible. As an example, another *Siyaphila* member told the group that she had actually felt secure enough in her newfound sense of ownership of the Bible that she had confronted her own church minister about the way he was using the Bible against people like her.⁹¹

The *Siyaphila* support groups are a site in which resilience is nurtured. The work of the Ujamaa Centre indicates that building the capacity of marginalised sectors to interpret the Bible from and for their own experience, recognising that the Bible is itself a site of struggle, nurtures the religio-spiritual dimensions of psycho-social resilience for those struggling to live positively with HIV in a context like South Africa, where the Bible is both an obstruction on the journey towards healing and a potential resource for restoration. The way we work with the Bible contributes towards an interpretive resilience.

For those new to the *Siyaphila* support group, one of whom had been warned against participating in it by her family and church, the overwhelming sense was one of excitement and support. Given what those who had been members of the group for some time were saying, they looked forward to learning more about the Bible and to bringing their own questions to the Bible. For the few who had found some support in their own local churches, the *Siyaphila* support group was additional support. As one said, it is “the continuation of a revival service”, alluding to one of the few opportunities lay people and women have of engaging with the Bible for themselves.⁹²

89 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 58.

90 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 58.

91 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 59.

92 West and Zengele, “The Medicine of God’s Word,” 59.

The AIDS Bible: The Beast in the Bible

But what if it is true that God is against ‘them’? What if God condemns and punishes those who are HIV-positive? If God is against the HIV-positive, who can stand against God?

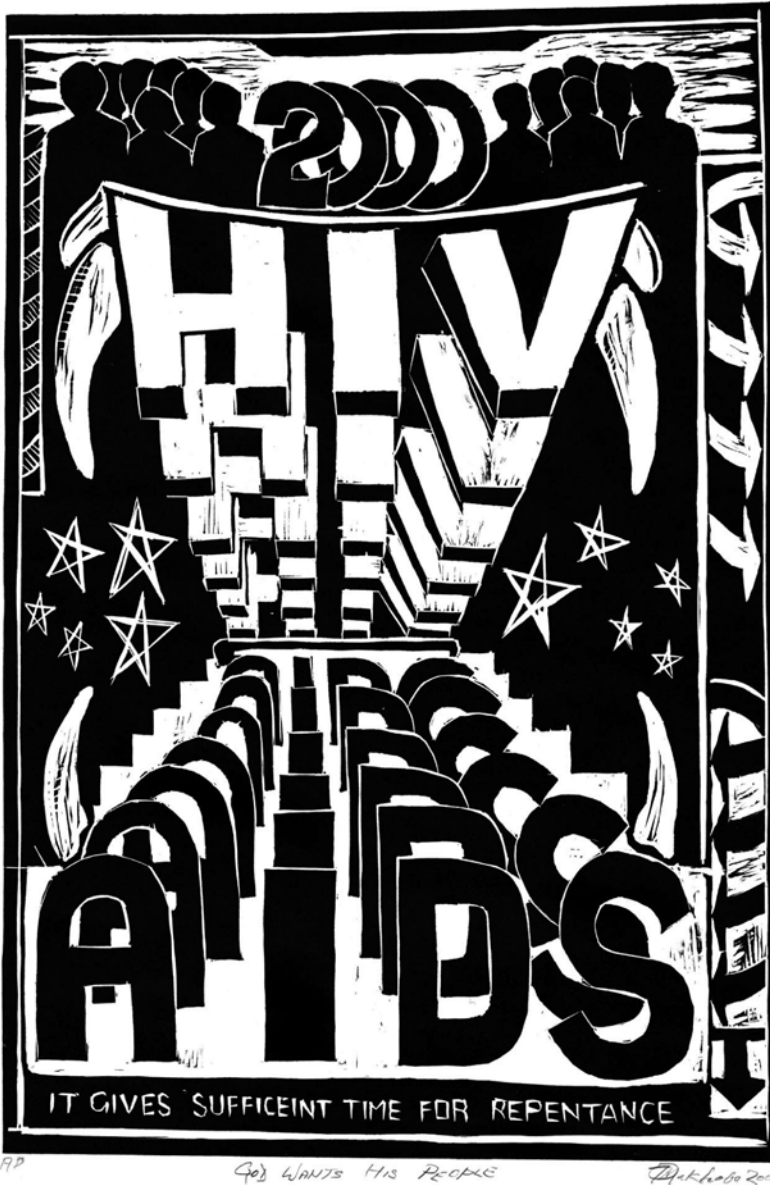


FIGURE 4 "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE", linocut on paper, 2001. Phila Trevor Makhoba (1956–2003).

The graphic art of Phila Trevor Makhoba (1956–2003) grapples with these questions. Theological themes of various kinds run through many of South African artist Makhoba's works. Even a casual glance at his art recognises religious themes in work after work, and in-depth analysis of his work by almost every commentator draws attention to the profound impact of both African (Traditional) Religion and Christianity on Makhoba.⁹³ Indeed, not only is Makhoba clearly aware of "The Mixing of Religions" (1994), the title of one of his early oil on canvas works in which Christianity and African Religion and/as culture form an integrated reality, Makhoba is conscious too of the contestation that takes place within Christianity, as is evident in his work "Mr A.C." (c1998), in which the Anti-Christ is depicted as a skeletal priest on a horse (probably inspired by the dreadful horses of Revelation 6) among, and looking down on, ordinary Christian women, in their church uniforms, with their church building in the background.⁹⁴ Both the mixing of religions and the theological contestation within religion are elements of Makhoba's linocut on paper, "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE" (2000),⁹⁵ the subject of this section.

That this work of Makhoba's, produced as part of the "HIV-AIDS Billboard & Print Portfolio: Artists for Human Rights" exhibition in 2000/01 and his first explicit comment on HIV and AIDS, is to be read theologically is clear; what is less clear is *how* this work is to be interpreted theologically. The words included in the frame, "IT GIVES SUFFICEINT TIME FOR REPENTANCE"—the upper case and spelling are Makhoba's—are clearly theological. The words handwritten below the frame, "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE", are also overtly theological.

At first glance the work presents the prevailing theological position on HIV and AIDS in South Africa (and further north in the African continent), which is that this disease is a punishment from God.⁹⁶ The theological perspective that pervades African communities is derived from a major theological trajectory in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. This predominant theology is known as the theology of retribution, and closely related to this theology is its corollary theology, a theology that emphasises a God who is totally in control. Briefly, the theology of retribution argues that what a person sows, so will

93 Leeb-du Toit, *Spiritual Art of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Tatham Art Gallery, 1993), 20.

94 See also Leeb-du Toit, "Contextualizing the Use of Biblically Derived and Metaphysical Imagery in the Work of Black Artists from Kwazulu-Natal: C1930–2002" (PhD, University of Natal, 2003) 232.

95 2000, MTN Art Collection. The image is used with the permission of Mrs G. Makhoba.

96 Chitando, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 8; West, "Sacred Texts and HIV and AIDS."

they reap. As the saying suggests, the metaphor for this form of theology comes from agriculture, and the saying (like the theology) probably has its origins in the early agricultural experience of ancient Israel.⁹⁷ In a context in which each family had its 'tribal' land, experience would generally show that those who worked diligently on their land would reap plentiful crops, while those who were lazy and neglectful of their land would reap weeds and dust. This reality of agricultural life was generalised into other aspects of community life. Given that God was in control of all spheres of life, the theological argument would go, and not just the agricultural sphere, those who lived righteous lives would be blessed and those who lived wicked lives would be cursed (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). This is very much also the argument of Job's friends.

However, as Gunther Wittenberg has carefully argued,⁹⁸ this community 'wisdom' became distorted as the political-economic context changed. With the rise of the 'Israelite' monarchy and centralised state, new pressures were brought to bear on the relatively settled and stable agricultural life of ordinary 'Israelites'. Before the monarchy, each extended-family based community would have been relatively autonomous, reaping what it sowed on its own land. Extended-family based communities would collaborate at certain times for specific tasks, such as larger-scale agricultural activities like terracing and irrigation, as well as in defence from the raids of neighbouring peoples (e.g. the Philistines). A monarchic system, having been rejected by this liberated slave-based collection of communities, became an option in order to deal with the persistent threats of Philistine raids, structured as it was around a full-time standing army. But there was a cost, as the prophet and judge Samuel warns the elders of the extended-family based communities who come to him asking for a king. Simply put, the king, his family and court, their retainers, and the army all had to eat, and they were not producers of food. So Samuel warns the elders of the people in 1 Samuel 8, a narrative re-membling of this political-economic shift,⁹⁹ when they come to him to ask for a king to govern them "like other nations", that the king as the representative of the centralised monarchic state would extract food and labour in the form of tribute and taxes

97 Wittenberg, "Job the Farmer: The Judean *Am-Harets* and the Wisdom Movement," *Old Testament Essays* 4 (1991); Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007).

98 Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament*, 72–77.

99 Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 21, no. 1 (2007); West, "Tracking an Ancient Near Eastern Economic System: The Tributary Mode of Production and the Temple-State," *Old Testament Essays* 24, no. 2 (2011).

from those living on the land. As Samuel reiterates again and again: “the king will take. . . .” (1 Samuel 8). Now it is no longer true that what you sow you reap. You sow, but others in addition to you and your family take and consume what you have produced. In other words, the experience of ordinary people living on the land is no longer the same as it was; it was now possible to work diligently and still not be able to live well because your resources were being taken by the centralised monarchic state to sustain itself.

However, as Wittenberg shows,¹⁰⁰ this change in experience did not lead to a change in theology, at least not initially. Theological systems are slow to change. What happened, according to Wittenberg, is that the theology remained but became inverted. Before, when people worked diligently it was generally accepted that they would reap the benefits of conforming to God’s order. In order to sustain this theology of retribution under the new centralised monarchic system a shift in perspective was required. Now those who showed signs of prosperity were assumed to have done what was right before God. Under this new political-economic order, it was argued, what you reaped indicated what you must have sown. This is precisely the argument of Job’s friends in the biblical book of Job.

The problem with this theology, of course, is that those who have prospered by unjust means were presumed to have lived righteously. Many houses and full barns, fine clothes and livestock, and extravagant imported goods were seen by the new political-economic system as signs of God’s blessing for a righteous life. Remarkably, even though there was clear evidence to contrary, this distorted theology of retribution endured. God, it was assumed, was in control, and so those who prospered must have pleased God by living wisely and justly according to God’s order.

This kind of theology has little understanding of structural-systemic injustice, and those who have advocated it tend to be those who benefit from systemic privilege, be it the racial privilege of apartheid, the middle-class privilege of capitalism, or the male privilege of patriarchy. Furthermore, this kind of theology has little place for compassion, for what you reap you must have sown. What advocates of a theology of retribution fail to recognise is the devastating effects of this theology on people living with HIV and AIDS.

Given this analysis, it is not surprising that the predominant view in most Christian communities is that HIV and AIDS is a punishment from God. Such a view receives ‘theological’ support also from African Religion, within which HIV and AIDS are a punishment from or the discipline of God/the ancestors;

100 Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament*, 76–78.

or are associated with witchcraft.¹⁰¹ Significantly, with respect to HIV and AIDS, there are religio-cultural resonances across Christianity and African Religion.

That HIV is transmitted mainly by (hetero)sexual intercourse (in our South African context), and so associated with sex, not only confirms the theological logic of this retributive orientation, but also constrains contestation with this theological orientation because it has been driven into the realm of taboo. Makhoba's art inhabits this tensive space.

Whatever the contribution of each religion, Christianity and African Religion in the case of Makhoba,¹⁰² to this religio-cultural toxic mix, there is no doubt that this is the dominant theology that people living with HIV and AIDS encounter in our South African society, both in and outside the church. The *Siyaphila* support groups bear testimony to this. They bear in their bodies, they are led to believe, God's punishment for their 'sins', particularly their sexual 'sins'. Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane admits in 2004 to the prevalence of this theology in the Christian church, saying, "Christianity has too often espoused a destructive theology that links sex and sin and guilt and punishment".¹⁰³ And with respect to society more generally, Nelson Mandela made it clear that, "Many who suffer from HIV and AIDS are not killed by the virus, but by stigma".¹⁰⁴

Makhoba's own embodied blend of African Religion and Christianity predisposes him to some form of theology of retribution, and his art exemplifies it. In his oil on board painting "They Were Deeply in Love" (2002) sex is clearly dangerous, as two skeletons engage in sexual intercourse on top of a grave in a cemetery at night, with the red AIDS ribbon on the tombstone behind them. The tone of this picture is sardonic, as Makhoba encompasses these skeletons with the fire of passionate love and two turtle-doves kissing at the foot of the grave. Similarly, in his oil and board painting a year later, "Don't Fall in Love at Night" (2003), a male skeleton is raping/having intercourse with (from the rear) a frightened looking/ecstatic healthy young woman, on a grave at night, with the woman clutching the tombstone with its talismanic red AIDS ribbon. The tone here is more ominous, with the male skeleton engulfed by fire

101 West, "Sacred Texts and HIV and AIDS," 135–138; Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 9–10, 18, 89, 108; see also Balcomb, "Sex, Sorcery, and Stigma."

102 Islamic religion/s in (South) Africa have a similar 'theological' orientation; see Esack and Chiddy eds, *Islam and AIDS: Between Scorn, Pity and Justice* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

103 *The Witness* July 30, 2004, 3.

104 *Mail and Guardian* 6–12 December, 2002, 21.

and lost in rapture and the healthy naked woman in her high-heel shoes looking more terrified than enraptured.

In "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE", the first of Makhoba's works engaging with HIV and AIDS, a theology of retribution is more clearly articulated, incorporating as the work does both image and language. The mouth of some great beast is waiting (or perhaps advancing) to devour those who do not repent with its twin gapping jaws: HIV (the upper jaw) and AIDS (the lower jaw). Tombstone-like and coffin-like teeth are poised to crush. Yet Makhoba's theology provides some hope: there is time, he proclaims in the frame, for repentance. The jaws have not yet closed, they remain open. "IT GIVES SUFFICEINT TIME". The "IT" he refers to is unclear, but probably refers to this beast, whose millennial nostrils provide an overt apocalyptic date. The darkness, he seems to be saying, of the new millennium and its heraldic disease are almost upon us, but there is still time (to repent).

Here, as in almost all of his work, Makhoba takes up the social location of social commentator and religious prophet. In his images generally, Juliette Leeb-du Toit argues, Makhoba "broaches tradition within the context of current realities in response to crises, both personal and national, upholding communal ideals, a return to the values of the past and the mores of Christianity as a counter to such problems".¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Valerie Leigh argues at length that Makhoba's African heritage and Christian beliefs provide him with the moral framework from within which he takes on the role of evangelical Christian and African cultural commentator.¹⁰⁶ Added to Makhoba's 'mixing' of Anglican and Zionist forms of Christianity with African religio-cultural perspectives and values, is also a later religious trajectory, that of Charismatic, 'born-again', Christianity.¹⁰⁷ In an interview with Mrs G. Makhoba, Trevor Makhoba's wife, she explained to me how her husband had at first embraced and then questioned, under the influence of this Charismatic strand of Christianity, the 'mixing' of Christianity and African Religion. In the interview she refers on a regular basis to the "The Mixing of Religions" (1994) picture, explaining at length how her husband shifted from "an Old Testament" emphasis to "a New Testament" emphasis under the influence of the evangelist Benny Hinn and his brand of Charismatic Christianity. "At the age of 31", she said, "Trevor

105 Leeb-du Toit, "Contextualizing the Use of Biblically Derived and Metaphysical Imagery," 230.

106 Leigh, "Aspects of Identity in Kwazulu-Natal Art 1980–2000 with Special Reference to the Complexity of Influences Shaping the Work of Andries Botha, Jinny Heath, Derek Leigh and Trevor Makhoba" (Master of Arts, University of Natal, 2002) 125–147.

107 Makhoba, "Christian Religion," (ed. West; Umlazi: Unpublished, 2005).

received the Gospel of Salvation”, which led him to reevaluate his theology, and resulted in him joining a Charismatic church. This ‘conversion’ to Charismatic Christianity also caused Trevor Makhoba to re-read his Bible, emphasising the New Testament more than the Old.¹⁰⁸ Charismatic Christianity, with its very strong emphasis on sowing and reaping,¹⁰⁹ would have offered additional categories and religio-cultural resources to Makhoba’s vocation as social commentator and Christian prophet.

The linocut which is the focus of this section of the chapter fits the prophetic pattern well. The horror of the punishment that awaits those who refuse God’s call is vividly portrayed. But the prophet’s voice/text is equally clear: “GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE”, “IT GIVES SUFFICEINT TIME”. This work of Makhoba’s also fits the disciplinary parameters of the deuteronomistic theology of retribution (which pervades the books of Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel and Kings): the people of God have forsaken their God, so therefore God has given them over to the consequences of their sinfulness, but when they cry out to God and/or the ancestors (as Makhoba’s pictures do), God hears, raises up a prophetic leader, and restores the people.¹¹⁰ Here, then, Makhoba aligns himself with a long line of biblical prophets who read ‘the signs of the times’ and speak accordingly to the people of God. “GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE”, Makhoba proclaims, along with Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, John the Baptist, Paul and the many others Makhoba has encountered in his well-read Bible. The implication of this prophetic call is that God’s people have gone astray, that they must repent and return to God and be saved; but that if they do not, God will punish them.

As indicated, in his early life there is a more comfortable integration between Makhoba the African religio-cultural commentator and Makhoba the Christian prophet, but in his later life there is a more tensive relationship. While there is little doubt that Makhoba is a product of both his African religion and culture and his various Christianities,¹¹¹ his art often indicates a somewhat contested relationship between African Religion and Christianity.

108 Makhoba, “Christian Religion.”

109 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), confirmed in Makhoba, “Christian Religion.”

110 Jobling, “Structuralist Criticism: The Text’s World of Meaning,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Jobling, *1 Samuel* (ed. Cotter; Collegeville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1998).

111 Leigh, “Aspects of Identity in Kwazulu-Natal Art,” 125–128; Leeb-du Toit, “Contextualizing the Use of Biblically Derived and Metaphysical Imagery,” 230–232; Makhoba, et al., “Endpiece,” in *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition Catalogue* (ed. Addleson; Durban: Durban Art Gallery, 2004), Makhoba, “Christian Religion.”

What his art proclaims, we will see, is captured in a comment Makhoba made in 1992 in an interview with Jo Thorpe: "I am a Christian although I am not a standard Christian".¹¹² Makhoba came from a *khohwa*-Christian background,¹¹³ was familiar with and participated in African Independent Church life, including, it would seem, Isaiah Shembe's *Ibandla lamaNazaretha*, and experienced a form of Charismatic conversion and worship.¹¹⁴ However, it would be wrong to view Makhoba's formation as linear; his engagements with these various forms of Christianity and their respective relationships with African Religion and culture are more complex. What is clear from his work is that with a few exceptions (see "Silent Night", 1990), his representations of Christianity are ambiguous.

It is no accident that in "Silent Night", a linocut in which African shepherds (Luke 2:8–18) and/or magi (Matthew 2:1–12) encounter an angelic messenger and/or a star announcing the birth of Jesus, the setting is rural. The rural/urban tension is one that is explored in many of Makhoba's images, and while Makhoba is not naive about rural life ("African Beat, Zulu Ritual", 1990), he tends to portray it in ideal terms (see for example, "All I Need Is the Air that I Breathe", 1990; "The Reed Dance", 1992; "Return of the Prodigal Son/*Ubuyile Uhushu*", 1993; "Still Life: The Perfect Zulu Meal", 1994; "We Are Having a Party/*Kusindue Ngobethole*", 1994; "*Inguyanzana/Caucus*", 1995; "Kuhle Kwethu . . . !!!—Perfectly Good at Our Home", 1995; "Mother of the Nation/*Nomkhubulwane*", 1996; "Stick on Your Culture", 1998; "*Omakoti*", 2002; "Portrait of King Cetswayo", 2003). Indeed, for Makhoba the rural not only symbolises what is wholesome, it also redeems many of the non-indigenous 'instruments' that corrupt urban African life. The guitar, concertina, electric piano, and saxophone are instruments of corruption in the city ("Song for School Children", 1989; "Things will Happen", 1991; "Cry from the Womb", 1995), but they are redeemed in the country ("The Valley of Love", 1993; "Heritage", 1999; "*Wadla Sokela*", 2002). Perhaps then, Christianity too is redeemed when located in a rural setting.

While there are clearly non-indigenous 'things' that cannot be redeemed, that threaten rural life, such as colonial forms of alcohol ("Song for School Children", 1989; "Blues in the Night/Blues in the Dark", 1991; "Things will Happen", 1991), the rural has the capacity to (re-)order life in redemptive ways.

112 Cited in Hobbs, "Casting Light; the Linocuts of Trevor Makhoba," in *Memorial Exhibition Catalogue* (ed. Addleson; Durban: Durban Art Gallery, 2005), 34.

113 Leigh, "Aspects of Identity in Kwazulu-Natal Art," 128.

114 Makhoba, "Christian Religion."

Makhoba even goes as far as politicising the rural with his “Toyi-Toying Cows” (1998). The rural is resistance in the service of righteousness. It redeems.

This is true too of sex. Makhoba deals directly with sex, both the ways in which those with power (like white madams and black male school teachers) demand sexual ‘favours’ of those ‘under’ their power and the ways in which passionate ‘love’ might lead to unprotected sex and HIV infection. Good sex is sex in the context of rural life (“*Jabula Mphimbo Uzonwinya*”, 1999). In the urban context sex is usually destructive, and is portrayed so in many of Makhoba’s images in a range of urban contexts, including inner-city parties, white suburbs, schools, television, and even hospital (“Dogs on Duty/Dogs of War”, 1995; “Great Temptation in the Garden”, 1995; “It’s Dad, Mum”, 1995; “Summer Friday Night with the Taxi-Driver”, 1996; “In the Eyes of a Paedophile”, 1996; “And Her Angry Mother Came in”, 1996; “No, Shiela will Be Back Tomorrow”; “Bravissimo”, 1997; “Untitled” [an image of children watching sex on television], 2001; “Special Prescription”, 2002). Given his anxiety about the urban, it is appropriate that Makhoba links sex and HIV and AIDS with(in) an urban cemetery. The kind of non-standard Christianity that Makhoba sees himself representing is a rural Christian, one who is deeply imbued with traditional African values. The rural leavens Christianity, saving it even from itself.

Makhoba’s early art contends with the Bible, though the later Makhoba might not be comfortable with this formulation. In an early oil on board image, “The Naked Truth” (1983), among the devices used to manacle and yoke African labour is the Bible. In another early image, “The Battle of Body and Soul” (1988), two white skeletons talk across a table on which alcohol and the Bible lie, with the heads of Africans mounted on the wall behind them as hunting trophies—hunting trophies which are taken from African rural areas to the urban areas. In addition, what complicates the Bible’s presence, even in rural locations, is that the Bible tends, in Makhoba’s art, to be more the domain of women than of men. In “Agony” (1991), an oil on paper, a Bible lies on an empty oil drum beside a woman who kneels before a picture of her deceased husband, as her two children cower behind her.¹¹⁵ The Bible is portrayed as a resource particularly for women, albeit sometimes as a rather ineffectual resource, as in his oil on canvas, “Police Raid on Cato Manor Shack Dwelling” (1993). Here an open Bible lies at the feet of an old woman as the police raid her family’s home. In an image his wife, Mrs Gugu Makhoba, referred to often in her interview with me on her husband’s understanding of Christianity,¹¹⁶ his oil on canvas “Mixing of

115 See Leeb-du Toit, “Contextualizing the Use of Biblically Derived and Metaphysical Imagery,” 231.

116 Makhoba, “Christian Religion.”

the Religions" (1994), the Bible is associated mainly with rural women rather than with rural men, and in a later work, "The Garden of History" (2002), an oil on paper, a kneeling white women in a sexually suggestive posture and in sexually explicit clothes offers a Bible to a traditional African man.

The message Makhoba seems to be proclaiming in this trajectory of his work in increasingly unambiguous terms is represented in one of his final works, "My Wife Teaches the Same Subject" (2003), in which an apparently drunk choirmaster is leaping about in front of a gospel choir, while aeroplanes fly in the night sky behind them (recurring symbols respectively for modernity and evil in Makhoba's work). So not only is the urban Bible ambiguous, the Bible is ambiguous when women control it, particularly when it is women who have moved out of the traditional structures of the rural African ideal. In "Big Bang in Beijing/Hard Blow in Beijing" (1996), an oil on board, a largely white male audience of a boxing match laugh with approval as a buxom bare-breasted black women flattens with a punch a black male, supported, it would seem, by a white bare-breasted female referee. It is only the traditionally clad women, sitting at ring-side, and perhaps the black males sitting further back—and perhaps the artist himself (despite the attempt by Paul Sibisi to read this work of Makhoba's in a more inclusive light)¹¹⁷—who express dismay.

There is little doubt that white use(r)s of the Bible are problematised by Makhoba, whether in the hands of white men ("The Naked Truth") or white women ("The Garden of History"). This is unambiguous. The use of the Bible by African women is more ambiguous in his work, for he recognises the Bible both as a resource for women and as an object women exert more control over than men. But this is not all that Makhoba says about the Bible, for in a few images he seems to see an alliance between traditional African rural values and the Bible. "Satan's Victim" (1990) is a good example of this, for in this mixed media on paper image Satan is about, it would appear, to tear or cut out pages from a large open Bible. Juliette Leeb-du Toit suggests that here Makhoba depicts the Bible and African traditional culture allied against abortion.¹¹⁸

While in most of his work Makhoba is the prophetic commentator, pointing and proclaiming, and contending for a form of Christianity that does not destroy traditional African values, there are clear signs in his work of a radical identification with the plight of his people. While his predominant role is that of a prophetic commentator, there are indications that at times he stands with

117 See Sibisi, *Uma Ngisaphila: As Long as I Live* (Standard Bank National Arts Festival, 1996), 11.

118 Leeb-du Toit, "Contextualizing the Use of Biblically Derived and Metaphysical Imagery," 231.

his bewildered people, lamenting, waiting in hope to receive the prophetic oracle of hope. Such, I think, is the case with respect to the linocut which is the focus of this section of the chapter.

Makhoba's theology is more complex than interviews with the artist and his wife indicate. When asked to speak in public about theology we tend to revert to the public transcript, that is, what we know we should say. We revert to and recite the public theology of our particular form of faith. Makhoba's work is more complex, portraying an embodied theology that is more contested. Indeed, there are clear signs that Makhoba's theology is deeply and profoundly contested, and this is clearest in the work under discussion. HIV and AIDS, as we have already noted, demand a more complex theology.

Though a theology of retribution is a dominant theology across the Christian traditions Makhoba is most familiar with, whether Anglican, Zionist, Nazarite, or Charismatic, there are other more marginal biblical theological 'trajectories'¹¹⁹ that interrupt the dominant theology of retribution, and there are signs of these in this work of Makhoba's. The clearest clue to the presence of other theological voices is the identity of Makhoba's beast. It seems that this beast most closely resembles the hippopotamus, though it may also exhibit some of the features of the crocodile. Crocodiles feature in at least one other of Makhoba's works, "African Beat" (1991). In this work, Leigh suggests, "the crocodiles stand for obstacles the people experience in finding jobs".¹²⁰ In "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE" the beast is a more ultimate, terminal obstacle, and the blurring of the characteristics of the crocodile and hippopotamus signals something more sinister and significant.

These beasts, the crocodile and the hippopotamus, share important features. They are both beasts that lurk beneath the surface of life, seemingly still and disinterested in human activity, and yet they can be roused and respond with ferocious force and devastating effects. While the real beasts reside in rural communities, they are present in other forms in urban African township life, or so Makhoba seems to be saying.

Makhoba's beast is, I think, also found in the Bible, in the book of Job. For it is in this book that we encounter Behemoth, sometimes translated as 'hippopotamus' (*imvubu*), as it is in the old (1893) isiZulu and the isiXhosa (1859/1975) translation (Job 40:15–24) and Leviathan, sometimes translated as 'crocodile'

119 Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (eds. Gottwald and Horsley; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

120 Leigh, "Aspects of Identity in Kwazulu-Natal Art," 132.

(*ingwenya*), as it is in the isiXhosa translation (Job 41:1–34). In the climatic chapters of the book of Job, when God finally addresses Job (38–41), God invokes two strange and wonderful beasts, beasts over which human beings clearly have no control (which is God’s point in these chapters), but beasts over which even God does not have complete control (which is perhaps the poet’s point in these chapters). Might part of Makhoba’s theology be found here, with Behemoth (the hippopotamus) and Leviathan (the crocodile) in the book of Job? “Behold now, Behemoth”, says God, “It is the first of the great acts of God—only its Maker can approach it with the sword” (Job 40:15 and 19, NRSV). As for Leviathan, says God,

were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it?
 No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up.
 Who can stand before it?
 Who can confront it and be safe?
 —under the whole heaven, who? (Job 41:9b–11, NRSV)

The book of Job is an excellent example of an intense debate about the theology of retribution. In the prose prologue we enter a world in which the theology of retribution is taken seriously. Job, we are told, was not only himself “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (1:1, NRSV), but he would also “send and sanctify” his sons and daughters after they had feasted, rising “early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, ‘It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts’” (1:5, NRSV). Job’s health and wealth, and the health and wealth of his sons and daughters, it is implied, is directly related to Job’s righteous life. The theology of retribution holds.

The story then becomes complicated, particularly for the reader, who is privy to the heavenly debate between God and his colleague, the satan (1:6–12). Job, however, is unaware of the heavenly wager (though its victim), and so is forced to live in a world which, from his perspective, no longer conforms to the principle of retribution. Job has lived righteously—God and the satan agree—but is punished rather than rewarded. At first Job doggedly accepts his fate, refusing to question God’s justice. So much so that he can say, having experienced the loss of his livestock and servants, the destruction of his property and the death of all of his children, and his own deteriorating health—after all this, he can say, “the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21, NRSV). Even the theologically astute call of his wife to put an end to his suffering by questioning God’s alleged order—“Do you still persist

in your integrity [ie. your theology]? Curse God, and die" (2:9, NRSV)—is met with an affirmation of God's just control from her husband: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (2:10, NRSV)

Job, it would appear, accepts "the bad" from God, remaining silent, refusing to "sin with his lips" (2:10, NRSV) by questioning God or the dominant theology of the day. As he silently sits his friends come among him, to "console and comfort him" (2:11, NRSV). And we know what they will say; they will each explain to him how he must have sinned, in some sense, for how else can he (or, more importantly, they) explain his suffering. By looking at the destroyed and diseased Job they can tell that God must be punishing him in some way for something he has done—this is how their theology works. He is reaping what he sowed. His current condition, they theologically assume, must be the consequence of substantial sin.

But before they can say anything, and to their credit they do not immediately 'counsel' Job, Job speaks. After a period of silent reflection Job speaks, but this is now a quite different Job, for he seems to adopt his wife's advice as he begins to question God's order and his friends' theology. If being righteous and blessing God brings about such havoc, then what damage can cursing God do? Having earlier refused to "sin with his lips", Job now resists with his lips. Perhaps reluctant to follow his wife's theological proposition the whole way, Job at first curses God indirectly rather than directly, cursing "the day of his birth" (3:1). Prose is no longer adequate for Job's discourse, and so the text shifts into poetry. This shift is more than a shift from prose to poetry however, it is also a shift in theology. It begins as follows:

Let the day perish on which I was to be born,
and the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.'
May that day be darkness;
let not God above care for it, nor light shine on it.
Let darkness and black gloom claim it;
let a cloud settle on it;
let the blackness of the day terrify it.
As for that night, let darkness seize it;
let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.
Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful shout enter it.
Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are prepared to rouse Leviathan.

Let the stars of its twilight be darkened;
 let it wait for light but have none,
 and let it not see the breaking dawn;
 Because it did not shut the opening of my mother's womb,
 or hide trouble from my eyes (Job 3:3–10 NAS).

Here is the beginnings of another theology; here is a cry of rage and pain; here is an incipient and inchoate theology that is struggling to be born from Job's tortured body and desolate household. Here is an attempt to undo what God did in Genesis 1; where God says, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), Job counters with, "Let the day be darkness".¹²¹ Here Job struggles with how to speak of God—how to do theology—in the context of immense suffering and loss.¹²² And so does Makhoba in would seem; he too struggles with how to speak of/to God in the context of HIV and AIDS. His beast, like Behemoth and Leviathan, poses profound theological questions, of how God's justice works and to what extent God is in control.

If Makhoba is drawing on the book of Job, then the first stanza of Job 3 cited above contains a number of other images that can be found in this work of Makhoba's. While Makhoba's beast draws from or resonates with Behemoth and Leviathan in Job chapters 40–41, the darkened human forms and the night's sky behind the beast's gapping mouth and crushing teeth are drawn from or resonate with Job chapter 3. Like Job and those in the *Siyaphila* support groups, Makhoba has turned to lament. As prophet, Makhoba stands outside the picture, proclaiming the words of the frame to others. As fellow-sufferer, Makhoba stands inside the picture, with the darkened figures and with the devouring beast in the darkness of the night.

As other commentators on Makhoba's work have noted, his work inhabits the tension characteristic of prophets, both proclaiming the values which they believe will "promote the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual health and well-being of society" and sharing a "profound identification with humanity".¹²³ HIV and AIDS confront Makhoba, and all of us, with this tension in its starkest form. "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE" transports us to the very heart of that tension.

121 See for example Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary: Job 1–20*, 67–105; Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 7–10.

122 See for example Stiebert, "Does the Hebrew Bible Have Anything to Tell Us About HIV/AIDS?," *Missionalia* 29 (2001); Masenya, "Between Unjust Suffering and the 'Silent' God: Job and HIV/AIDS Sufferers in South Africa," *Missionalia* 29 (2001).

123 Leigh, "Aspects of Identity in Kwazulu-Natal Art," 127.

Makhoba uses a number of devices to draw us as viewers into this tension. First, he ‘funnels’ our gaze into the centre of the work, a device he uses in a number of paintings (see “Uhuru”, 1992 and “Nkosi Sikelela i-Africa”, 1992/93 in particular). The difference between “GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE” and the these two earlier works is that while they funnel horizontally, this work funnels us vertically, right into the mouth of the beast. Second, the rotating arrows on the right side of the linocut, one set turning away from and one set turning into and then down the gaping mouth, clearly contend for the attention of the viewer and offer opposing options to the viewer. Are we on the path to destruction or are we on the way of salvation? And where, one wonders, is Makhoba himself?

Third, Makhoba uses writing and numbers to express contending messages. The words in the frame of the linocut, “IT GIVES SUFFICIENT TIME FOR REPENTANCE”, and the words written below the linocut, “GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE”, may be read to mutually support each other, with the subject in each case being God, or they may be read as contending with each other, with the “IT” referring to the beast. The latter interpretation pits God and the beast over against each other, warring for the silhouetted masses who stand in darkness. The millennial signification of the numeral “2000” is also tensive, proclaiming both a potential new beginning and a potential apocalyptic ending. Finally, the coffin and tombstone-like teeth are foregrounded, literally in the face of the viewer, contesting any positive interpretation the viewer may glean from either of Makhoba’s theological sentences.

A fourth and related device Makhoba employs is the very combination of writing/text and image. Words, whether written or oral, and there are hints of the oral/aural in the prophetic and preaching-like language within and below the frame, Makhoba seems to be saying, are insufficient to say what needs to be said. Image is clearly Makhoba’s dominant medium, whether in ink or oils. However, having created the image, Makhoba is compelled to offer ‘words’ of hope.

Makhoba, his widow Gugu Makhoba tells us,¹²⁴ was neither formally trained nor did he work as a commercial artist; he produced art to express himself and describe his reality. In the words of Juliette Leeb du Toit and Mduduzi Xakasa, Makhoba’s art is “not merely art for visual pleasure or vicarious empathy but art which serves a social purpose”.¹²⁵ They associate Makhoba with African art

¹²⁴ Makhoba, et al., “Endpiece.”

¹²⁵ Leeb-du Toit and Xakasa, “Trevor Phila Makhoba’s Narratives and Their Affinities,” in *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians* (Stellenbosch: South African Association of Art Historians, 1997), 72.

in general, which has as its primary purpose to “honour, instruct, uplift, clarify, or even scold, expose, and ridicule to push people to be what they must be”.¹²⁶

As we have seen, and as Leeb du Toit and Xakasa reiterate, “in exploring his own values and proposed solutions to personal dilemmas”, Makhoba “acts as an educator much as the folk teller or diviner plays his or her role as social regulator”. As they go on to say, and here Makhoba’s interest in and inspiration from oral forms becomes clear, “his visual discourse increasingly echoes the role presently dominated by certain musicians and poets in the region who, in emergent traditions of orality (rooted in residual ones), such as *maskanda*, *isicathamiya* and *mbaqanga* act as observers of social realities and impress moral lessons”. Like Makhoba, these musicians and poets “assess and explore most dimensions of society, hoping to extricate cultural priorities and restore social prestige and order”.¹²⁷

Further, in keeping with the *maskanda* and *isicathamiya* tradition, Makhoba explores reality in themes which vary from inconsequential matters such as love, celebration and everyday pastimes (music and soccer in particular), to themes which ponder the traumas of living, e.g. death, violence, deprivation, gender conflict, or political injustice. No experience escapes his brush: religious intermixing, lack of privacy in township dwellings, abortion, rape, incest and paedophilia.¹²⁸

This linocut about HIV and AIDS adds to the catalogue of “the traumas of the living”, but significantly, images, even with their oral heritage, are insufficient to say what he tries to say here. So, like other social prophets before him, including the religious leader Isaiah Shembe and the artist Azaria Mbatha (see below), Makhoba takes up the colonial tools of literacy (and numeracy) to complement (and perhaps contest) his images. Makhoba asks the viewer to move to-and-fro between literacy, orality/aurality, and image. Doing theology in the context of HIV and AIDS as Makhoba clearly is, requires a range of tools in an attempt to say what cannot be said to and about God.

126 Leeb-du Toit and Xakasa, “Trevor Phila Makhoba’s Narratives and Their Affinities,” 72.

127 Leeb-du Toit and Xakasa, “Trevor Phila Makhoba’s Narratives and Their Affinities,” 72. As Leeb du Toit and Xakasa go on to note, Makhoba, was himself an “accomplished exponent of the guitar and saxophone” and was “well-versed in *maskanda* and *isicathamiya*” (73).

128 Leeb-du Toit and Xakasa, “Trevor Phila Makhoba’s Narratives and Their Affinities,” 73.

By all of these means, Makhoba grapples theologically with the presence of HIV and AIDS in his community. The beast is before us, but precisely what does God want from or for his people? "GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE" to do or be what? The incompleteness and ambiguity of these words portrays Makhoba's theological torment, and yet he does find hope in the Bible, in the book of Job, as we have seen, though the message is a mixed one. He also finds hope perhaps, in the midst of God's judgement, in two other texts. Rather boldly, Makhoba amends and adapts the biblical text of 1 Peter 4:1–3 and 2 Corinthians 12:9 respectively in sourcing his use of the phrase "IT GIVES SUFFICEINT TIME FOR REPENTANCE".

For here we read in 1 Peter 4:1–3, though I am not sure what translation Makhoba alludes to, the following:

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries (NAS).

If Makhoba is alluding to this text in his words within the linocut, "IT GIVES SUFFICEINT TIME FOR REPENTANCE", then he alters their import, granting still more time than the author of 1 Peter for repentance. Here Makhoba extends God's grace into the future, appropriating the other biblical text referred to above: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NAS). Makhoba appropriates but extends God's grace beyond the limits set by the Bible.

But what if "IT" is not God but (the beast of) HIV and AIDS? Will "IT" pay heed to Makhoba's declaration? Makhoba, like Job, yearns for God to be fully in control, but what if God is not? So the contestation remains; Makhoba is caught between retribution and redemption. Makhoba inhabits the creative and tensive space between subject and object. His care for his culture, faith, and community and his prophetic calling make him the subject, identifying the signs of the times, warning his people of coming calamity, and offering words of hope. His human integrity and his awareness of his own 'sinfulness' place him as the object, lamenting as he wonders and waits for a word of comfort and hope, and perhaps a more relevant theology. Is the HIV/AIDS beast God's punisher, like the accuser (the satan) in the book of Job (2:1–7), or is

the HIV/AIDS beast more like Behemoth and Leviathan, creatures that even God struggles to control? The answers are not easy, as Job found, but he and Makhoba are commended by God (Job 42:7) for asking the hard questions in the face of conventional theology and even in the face of God.

Makhoba struggles with how to speak of God in the context of HIV and AIDS; and so he carves this linocut, forsaking his more familiar medium of oil paint on canvas. Cutting is more suitable for his purposes, as he forms a beast, in the likeness of Behemoth and Leviathan, that poses the profound theological question of whether God is just and/or fully in control. Makhoba with millions of African Christians hopes God is just and in control, but worries when considering the evidence of African realities.

The Narrative Bible: African Commentary in Art

Azariah Mbatha's appropriation of the story of Joseph from the biblical book of Genesis (Genesis 37–50) is an African appropriation.



FIGURE 5 "Joseph," linocut on paper, 1964–1965. Azariah J.C. Mbatha (1941–).

Mbatha locates the story in Africa, which is where most of the Joseph story as told in Genesis takes place (in Egypt), and he reads the story from and for his African context. The characters, themes, and concerns are African, with the symbols and ideas coming specifically from the Zulu tradition and culture.¹²⁹ In a typical post-colonial move, Mbatha both resists the missionary-colonial 'message' of the Bible and claims the Bible as an African artefact. The Bible, for Mbatha, tells an African story, with Mbatha here appropriating the ancestors of Jacob/'Israel', Isaac, Joseph and his brothers, and their mothers as African ancestors. Mbatha's reading re-members the pre-colonial past, a past which, he says, "we need to be reminded by and about", and which "we as Africans were compelled to forget".¹³⁰ Without mentioning the Bible's role in the missionary-colonial imperial project, Mbatha goes on to be more explicit: "It was European civilization which brought the end of African civilization and replaced it with its own. I cannot find the words to describe what a terrible crime this is".¹³¹ Remember the past we must, asserts Mbatha, who then goes on to 're-member' the Bible in order to remember the African past.

Born in 1941, Azaria Mbatha was educated at a mission school and then offered training and a place to practice his art by the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre,¹³² first at Umpumulo (later known as Mapumulo) and then at the Centre's permanent home at Rorke's Drift, where he later (1968) taught.¹³³ But as Mbatha asserts, notwithstanding his missionary education and training or his many years as a resident in Europe, "I was inspired by the allegories of my people, by their critique of western religion and education, by their drama, poetry and fiction and by their remarkable prosopography".¹³⁴

For Mbatha's retelling of the biblical story of Joseph is a 're-membering'. In the words of Jean and John Comaroff, "Creative figures [in post-colonial contexts]—be they [artists,] poets, prophets, even witchfinders; whether they work with [images,] mirrors, medicines or the written word—are *experimental* practitioners. They try to make universal signs speak to particular realities"; "their activities are in fact a means of *producing* historical consciousness: they

129 Mbatha, *Im Herzen Des Tigers: In the Heart of the Tiger* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1986), 6.

130 Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 7.

131 Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 8.

132 <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/rorkes-drift-art-and-craft-centre>.

133 <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/azaria-mbatha>.

134 Mbatha, *Within Loving Memory of the Century: An Autobiography* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), ix.

seek to shape the inchoateness, the murky ambiguity of colonial encounters into techniques of empowerment and signs of collective representation".¹³⁵ This re-making or re-membering of universal signs in the specifically South African colonial matrix of missionary-colonial endeavour and the encroachments of modern capitalism has drawn readers like Mbatha "into a conversation with the culture of modern capitalism—only to find themselves enmeshed . . . in its order of signs and values".¹³⁶ And yet, "even as they are encompassed by the European capitalist system—consumed, ironically as they consume its goods and texts—they often seek to seize its symbols, to question their authority and integrity, and to reconstruct them in their own image".¹³⁷ Mbatha's linocut, both in its form and in its images, might be interpreted as being engaged in such resisting conversation. The linocut partially seizes and remakes the left-to-right and top-to-bottom conventions of colonial text to tell an African story of struggle from a European brought book (—the Bible). In so doing Mbatha, and others like him, "escape the dominant order without leaving it".¹³⁸ Contesting European domination, Mbatha becomes implicated in it, for by 'exhibiting' his linocut in the public realm, Mbatha contends within the dominant discourse. Missionary-colonial 'biblical' discourse is, Mbatha recognises, "a plastic idiom or dialect that is capable of carrying an enormous variety of meanings, including those that are subversive of their use as intended by the dominant".¹³⁹

Mbatha's linocut portrays the perspective of Africa in its concern for community and in its concentration on human struggle (and human hope). Every panel of the linocut is filled with African characters, and in all but the last, each panel is full of struggle. This is not a story of an individual but the story of a clan, of a community. It is a story of *ubuntu*, the isiZulu term that signifies that a person is a person because of other people. But it is also a story of the betrayal of *ubuntu*, and so of the reality of powerlessness and isolation.¹⁴⁰

The damage done to *ubuntu* is recognised in each but the last panel. Reading from left-to-right and from top-to-bottom, though not the only way 'to read' this linocut, we can discern communal struggle and contestation at the centre of each panel. In panel 1 the contestation is between the dreams of the

135 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xxii.

136 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, xii.

137 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, xii.

138 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, xii.

139 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 102–103.

140 Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 7, 9.

youngest son, who dreams that he will rule over his older brothers and his mother and father, and the reception of these dreams by Joseph's parents and his older brothers. Mbatha locates the contested images in the centre, between Joseph and his father and mother, with his back turned to his older brothers.

Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, "Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf." Then his brothers said to him, "Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words (Genesis 37:5–8, NAS).

Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" (Genesis 37:9–10, NAS)

In panels 2 and 4 a human being is being exchanged for money; the human being is an object to be bought and sold. These two panels depict the two times Joseph is sold: to slave-traders by his brothers and then by the slave-traders to an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh. Joseph is a victim of the slave-trade, an ancestor of the millions of African slaves that will follow him (though their slave routes will be different). The struggle here is palpable as a human being is exchanged as an object of trade, sold by his own brothers, setting brother against brother. Not only do the brothers sell their brother, they rationalise the economic transaction.

When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer! Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!" But Reuben heard this and rescued him out of their hands and said, "Let us not take his life." Reuben further said to them, "Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him"—that he might rescue

him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. So it came about, when Joseph reached his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him; and they took him and threw him into the pit (Genesis 37:18–24, NAS).

Then they sat down to eat a meal. And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing aromatic gum and balm and myrrh, on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” . . . and [they] sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver (Genesis 37:25–26, 28, NAS).

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there (Genesis 39:1, NAS).

The contestation in panel 3 is between truth and deception, as the brothers offer their father and one of the mothers (perhaps Rachel, the mother of Joseph) Joseph’s blood-stained coat, inviting them to believe that he has been devoured by a wild animal, not by his own brothers. Mbatha re-members the way in which clothing has the capacity to deceive, as missionaries like Moffat envisaged re-clothing Africans, re-fashioning them in the image and likeness, not of God, but of Europeans.¹⁴¹ In the Joseph story the special outer garment that Jacob gives his favourite son, a sign of favouritism that divides Joseph the son of his father’s favourite wife (Rachel) from the sons of both the first wife (Leah) and the secondary wives (Bilhar and Zilphar), is stripped from Joseph by his brothers and smeared with the blood of an animal, then shown to their father, asking him to identify and interpret it. Jacob creates his own narrative from the bloodstained garment.

So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We found this; please examine it to see whether it

141 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 218–273; Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 58–64.

is your son's tunic or not." Then he examined it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces!" So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days (Genesis 37:31–34, NAS).

Panel 5, the central panel on another 'reading', portrays yet more deception, as once again Joseph's clothing is used to tell a lie. Potiphar's wife frames Joseph, her slave, because he refuses to have sex with her. Once again there is a struggle between the truth and a lie. Once again Joseph is naked, stripped by someone with power over him. Madams, as Makhoba also recognises ("The Garden of History"), have power over their servants. Joseph is betrayed and framed by the very garment that his slave owners have given him.

It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused. . . . Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned (Genesis 39:7–8, 10–19, NAS).

Panel 6 echoes panel 1, as once again the interpretation of dreams raises Joseph above others, the Egyptian seers of Pharaoh. Joseph embodies the capacity to interpret dreams, an (ambiguous) gift from God, for interpretation is not an innocent activity. And it is the interpretation of these dreams of the Egyptian Pharaoh that shift the biblical narrative from a narrative about an extended family to a political-economic narrative about political power and economic subjugation, though the latter is not the focus of Mbatha's appropriation. His narrative art emphasis is on the African familial dimension of the biblical story.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (Genesis 41:15–16, NAS).

"Now [said Joseph] let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine." Now the proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you." Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 41:33–41, NAS).

If colonialism has schooled Mbatha about slavery, the complicity of local elites in the management of apartheid has prepared him for Joseph's co-option by the Egyptian court, for in panels 7 and 8 it is Joseph who betrays *ubuntu*. In panel 7 Joseph, who is now an important and powerful official in Egypt, uses his position to conceal his identity from his brothers and to force the brothers to leave their brother Simeon behind as a hostage when they return home with the food they have obtained, ensuring that they will return to Joseph with Benjamin, his younger brother by his mother Rachel. And as panel 8 indicates, Jacob is forced later when the food runs out to send Benjamin back with his brothers as a ransom for Simeon and in exchange for food. Mbatha recognises, and remembers, the suffering of those who are manipulated and exploited by the powerful. Mbatha exposes the powerful, those "who live in this world at the expense of the weak".¹⁴²

Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him

¹⁴² Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 5.

with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly (Genesis 42:6–7, NAS).

So he put them all together in prison for three days. Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die” (Genesis 42:17–20, NAS).

Though the joy of the family reunion in panel 9 is the final ‘word’ for Mbatha’s appropriation of the biblical narrative, the residual pain of panel 1 mixes with the tears of joy as Joseph rules over his family in a foreign land, fulfilling the dominating dreams of the first panel.

Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel [Jacob]; as soon as he appeared before him, he fell on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. Then Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive” (Genesis 46:29–30, NAS).

Mbatha does not dwell on the extensive episode in which Joseph torments his brothers (Genesis 42–46), nor on the economic systems that Joseph puts in place that enslave the people of Egypt (Genesis 41:46–57; 47:13–25).¹⁴³ His focus is the extended family and the kinds of contestation that threaten to rupture the African family. The pervasiveness of forms of betrayal in Mbatha’s linocut resides in his recognition that the oppression of the weak is perpetrated and perpetuated not only by those outside the community (panels 4 and 5), but also by members of the community (panels 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8). This is genuinely terrible: the recognition that the will and ability to dominate and destroy lies among us in the family and community.¹⁴⁴ *Ubuntu* is broken, families are separated and communities removed, not only by forces without but also by forces within. This is a properly post-colonial recognition and Mbatha’s

143 Castillo, “Ridiculing the Empire: Rhetorical Strategy as Critique of the Monarchic Discourse of Salvation in Genesis 47.13–26” (Master of Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014).

144 Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 10.

linocut is a form of (partial) resistance to this reality and the recognition of moments of restoration.

By foregrounding the youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin, in his interpretation, Mbatha recovers the story's emphasis on community continuity. "When a child is born the chain of ancestors grows by another link",¹⁴⁵ hence the devastation experienced by Jacob and Rachel in panels 1, 3, and 8, though neither Rachel (nor any of the other mothers) is explicitly mentioned in the biblical version. Not only is the continuity of community directly threatened by the death of a young (favourite) male, but a connecting link with the *amadlozi* (ancestors) is also lost because the *amadlozi* often speak through young children in dreams and visions (as in panel 1).¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, as Mbatha remembers, a child who dies lacks the wisdom and experience of the community to become a significant ancestor who will guarantee continuity between the past and the future.¹⁴⁷

So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son [Joseph] many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him (Genesis 37:34–35, NAS).

But Jacob said, "My son [Benjamin] shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should befall him on the journey you are taking, then you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow" (Genesis 42:38, NAS).

Like Jacob's family, the African family-clan is affected by both the living and the dead. The *amadlozi* (the living dead) watch over and guide the family-clan. But malign forces are also at work, activated by 'witchcraft'. In African contexts "material transactions are inseparable from a moral traffic in human and superhuman powers"; indeed, while the seeds of African witchcraft precede colonisation, "soul-eating [or bewitching—*ukuthakatha*—in Mbatha's Zulu culture] is thought to be driven by an appetite for money, a hunger unleashed, as local [African] commentators stress, by European colonialism".¹⁴⁸ Mbatha's emphasis on dreams and their ambiguous effects in panels 1 and 4 (located in

¹⁴⁵ Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 41.

¹⁴⁷ Mbatha, *In the Heart of the Tiger*, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, xiv.

panels that draw the eye of the viewer-reader) locate this story within the realm of contestation within the religio-cultural 'spirit' realm.¹⁴⁹ How else, the traditional Mbatha might be wondering, can one of the youngest in the family-clan sit (in the final panel, panel 9) 'above' his father? For surely this seating arrangement flouts the deferential system of *hlonipha* (respect), so central to Zulu traditional culture?¹⁵⁰ Or, perhaps, for the Christian Mbatha, "this kind of [African] tradition does not hold sway"?¹⁵¹ For Mbatha the African/Christian tension is embodied in his own art.

Mbatha is not unaware that his contestation of domination implicates him in it. In panel 6, Mbatha, like Pharaoh, clothes Joseph in the clothing of the colonial power. In taking on a colonial form Joseph, like Mbatha, becomes implicated in colonial practice. As we have seen, Mbatha's reading is especially sensitive to the clothing imagery in the story. Joseph's beautiful cloak separates him from his brothers and is a symbol of his father's favouritism in panel 1. But his cloak is also a symbol of conflict in the family, because it is stripped from him when he is assaulted and sold by his brothers (panel 2). The cloak, which the brothers have smeared with blood, is then used to deceive their father and mother (panel 3). As in panel 2, so in panel 4 Joseph's vulnerability and powerlessness is portrayed again by the absence of clothing. In both panels he is again unclothed and naked, an object deprived of dignity. Between the events of panels 4 and 5 Joseph has been clothed by Potiphar, signifying his new position and power, because in panel 5 Potiphar's wife holds Joseph's garment in her hand as an accusation against him. Once again clothing is used to deceive. But in panels 6, 7, and 9 Joseph is clothed once again, this time with the clothes of Egyptian favour and power.

The irregular boxes (panels 4/7 and 6/9) in which Mbatha frames these episodes of the story are a sign, perhaps, of a subtle deconstruction of the dominant form that encompasses his resisting reading, and may even offer other ways of re-memembering the linocut. In both cases Joseph assumes the place of the powerful, 'taking' Potiphar's place (panel 4) in panel 7, and 'taking' Pharaoh's place (in panel 6) in panel 9. Joseph is 'inserted' into the power of empire, Egypt being a significant empire in the ancient Near East.

Similarly the prominence given to the female figure in panels 1, 3, 5, and 6, reminds the African interpreter of the biblical story that although the story appears to be about a father and his sons, the movement of the plot is substantially shaped (as Isaiah Shembe recognised) by the socio-cultural

149 Mbatha, *An Autobiography*, 31–33.

150 Mbatha, *An Autobiography*, 355.

151 Mbatha, *An Autobiography*, 355.

relationships between the four wives—with Leah as *indlovukazi* ('first wife'), Rachel as *inthandokazi* ('favourite/loved wife'), and Bilhah and Zilpah each as *isancinza* ('helper to the wife')—and their husband (Jacob) and between these mothers and their respective sons. And the central panel, panel 5, reminds African readers of how colonial and apartheid madams might use their economic and racial power to sexually exploit the young African males who are servants in their homes and gardens.

Mbatha offers a range of points of access and interpretation in this linocut. While attentive to the detail of the text with respect to family-clan matters, Mbatha only hints at the larger political-economic role that Joseph takes up after he has settled his family in Egypt, not re-memembering that it is Joseph who takes the cattle and the land from the people, forcing them to move from the rural areas to the cities, thus enslaving them (Genesis 42:13–21). Following the emphasis of the biblical story itself, Mbatha re-members instead the effects of geo-political forces on the family-clan.

The Apocalyptic Bible: The 'Son of Man' in South Africa

Son of Man transforms a Jesus story clearly indebted to the Gospel, the Chester Mystery Plays, and previous Jesus movies by reenacting it in a contemporary, fictional African country of 'Judea'. *Son of Man* mingles the words of Jesus and South African activist Steve Biko. The movie conjoins a news-reel-style depiction of a shantytown (much of the film was shot in the Khayelitsha shantytown near Cape Town, South Africa) with an aura of magical realism that incorporates angels, miracles, and supernatural frames. Avoiding an easy, racist dichotomy between good and evil, the movie utilizes only black actors who speak primarily in Xhosa and English. The English spoken by newscasters with BBC accents may, however, suggest an off-screen white presence. More ominously, the leaders, responsible for Jesus' death, not only speak English but also use language that echoes that of Western politicians.¹⁵²

Biblical apocalyptic literature has been appropriated by Africans within South Africa. George Nazar Khambule, a contemporary of Isaiah Shembe, re-members the book of Revelation in the construction of his post-First World

152 Walsh, et al., "Introduction," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2013), ix.

War South African Christian 'church'.¹⁵³ And Allan Boesak offers an in-depth analysis of the biblical book of Revelation in the context of the struggle against apartheid during the 1980s.¹⁵⁴ But our expectations as we began to watch South Africa's own 'Jesus' movie were not that this would be an apocalyptic remembering of the story of Jesus.

"Where were the whites?", I wondered aloud as soon as the final credits of the movie *Son of Man* had finished.¹⁵⁵ Surely a story told by South Africans, set in more-or-less contemporary (post-colonial?) South Africa should reflect our racialised landscape?¹⁵⁶ "But did you notice the colour of the fringe of the blanket that the circumcised Jesus wore as he contended with Satan?", Luxolo Gqomfa asked us, ignoring my question, after we had watched the film together in our Biblical Studies Honours and Masters class at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Others were more interested in the songs that were sung, and snatches of song were exchanged among the isiXhosa speaking students in the class.¹⁵⁷ "But why situate the film among the amaXhosa and not the more familiar amaZulu, and why were the 'wise men' in the movie from among the BaSotho?", inquired Takuze Chitsulo, who comes from Malawi.

We were all African biblical studies students watching a film about Jesus set in South Africa.¹⁵⁸ But what struck us, at first, were the contextual features,

153 Draper, "The Closed Text and the Heavenly Telephone: The Role of the *Bricoleur* in Oral Mediation of Sacred Text in the Case of George Khambule and the Gospel of John," in *Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (ed. Draper; Atlanta, Pietermaritzburg and Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature, Cluster Publications and E.J. Brill, 2003); Draper, "George Khambule and the Book of Revelation: Prophet of the Open Heaven," *Neotestamentica* 38, no. 2 (2004).

154 Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987).

155 Dornford-May, "Son of Man," (2005).

156 For similar reflections and a discussion of (white) agency in the film see Punt, "'Thula' (Be Quiet): Agency in *Son of Man*," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

157 Nkadameng and Baugh, "Strategies of Sound: Revolutionary Music and Song in *Son of Man*," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

158 Our class included the following and the reflections in this section are based on our discussion. Rosemary Beukes (South Africa), Helder Luis Carlos (Mozambique), Takuze Chitsulo (Malawi), Kennedy Gora (Kenya), Luxolo Gqomfa (South Africa), Lewis Gumede (South Africa), Madinisa Mbozanani (South Africa), V.S. Ndumo (South Africa). A special thanks to Luxolo Gqomfa for his assistance in guiding our engagement with his language and culture. What follows is our communal, embodied, commentary on the movie. The presence of the movie is presumed; West, "The *Son of Man* in South Africa?,"

not the biblical features. Our postgraduate biblical studies module was focussed on the methodological dimensions of African biblical scholarship, using the emerging ‘tri-polar’ model of African biblical scholarship as our framework. This model identifies three poles in the practice of African biblical scholarship: the African context, the biblical text, and the ideo-theological mode of appropriation used by the reader to move back-and-forth between context and text.¹⁵⁹ The film *Son of Man* was viewed in our final class together and our task was to discern together what the film was doing with each of these elements in the tri-polar model. Like our biblical interpretation more generally, our analysis of this film began with the African context, following the film as it unfolded in three narrative sections. But before we come to our comments, here is a brief overview of the movie:

The first part . . . deals with Jesus’ life up to his ‘baptism’ . . . [T]he movie opens with the fall of Lucifer, but rewrites it as Jesus’ heavenly temptation by and victory over Satan. Satan’s resulting ‘fall to earth’ (portrayed as a tumble down a sand dune) precedes a sharp cut to “continuing violence in Judea”, making this downtrodden, oppressed world seem to belong to Satan.

A young woman finds safety by hiding in a school room among slaughtered children. Suddenly, a child angel appears and tells this woman that she will give birth to a child named Jesus. The woman is obviously Mary, and a traditional [gospel] infancy narrative follows, complete with modern renderings of shepherds, magi, and the slaughter of the innocents. The slaughter serves to motivate the adult Jesus’ struggle, with his community, for human dignity. Portrayed as a Xhosa circumcision ritual with other young men, Jesus’ baptism marks his entry into adulthood (as a son of man) and the opening of his political activism.

in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

- 159 Draper, “‘For the Kingdom Is inside of You and It Is Outside of You’: Contextual Exegesis in South Africa (Lk. 13:6–9),” in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (eds. Hartin and Petzer; vol. New Testament Tools and Studies of; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); West, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa,” in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Stinton; London: SPCK, 2010); Draper, “African Contextual Hermeneutics: Readers, Reading Communities, and Their Options between Text and Context,” *Religion & Theology* 22 (2015).

The next . . . [section] summarize[s] Jesus' public life, beginning with the call of his twelve disciples and the rescue of a prostitute about to be set on fire . . . Three miracles follow in quick succession . . . the 'healing of the paralytic' (Mk 2.1–12) . . . The raising of 'Lazarus' [John 11.1–44] and an exorcism without a clearly identifiable gospel parallel follow.

Brief summaries of Jesus' teaching, which has a decidedly modern and political cast, punctuate these miracles. Human dignity and community development, not theology, take center stage. Judas films Jesus' activities with a camcorder and sneaks off at night to show the recordings to Annas and Caiaphas, who see Jesus' activities at first as simply "mumbo jumbo for children". Jesus worries them enough, however, that they ask Judas for "proof" of Jesus' "political ambitions". When Jesus delivers his 'Sermon on the Mount' [Matthew 5.1–7.29] from atop a concrete out-house urging his listeners to act in solidarity as a movement against oppression, a riot very nearly breaks out. Judas offers a video of this reaction to Annas and Caiaphas with the terse words, "Got him". Although Annas and Caiaphas now begin to suppress Jesus' growing movement violently, they eventually offer Jesus and his disciples a share in their political coalition/power. Jesus refuses to compromise his ideals with the Democratic Coalition, and he and his disciples walk out of the meeting.

The third and final section of the film . . . depicts Jesus' 'passion'. It begins with a meeting between Caiaphas, Annas, and the governor of the Democratic Coalition. Caiaphas and Annas show Judas's video recordings to the governor, who tells them, "This is not evidence". It is only "tales for children", and there is "nothing I can do". When Annas and Caiaphas exclaim, "Then let us deal with him!" the governor says, "It will have nothing to do with me, if he disappears".

The Last Supper, Jesus' arrest, his brutal beating by Annas and Caiaphas (in a last-ditch attempt to extract a political compromise from him), his murder, and the 'disappearance' of his body follow. When Hundred—a name that literally evokes the centurion of the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 27:54; Mk 15:39; Lk. 23:47)—reveals the location of Jesus' body, Mary exhumes it from its shallow grave. In the movie's climax, she and her followers raise Jesus' body on a hillside cross above the shantytown to protest the injustice and oppression of the political powers. When the police

try to disperse the mourners, Mary leads a nonviolent song-and-dance (a *toyi-toyi*) resistance. The denouement includes cross graffiti, shadows over the empty grave, an epilogue balancing the supernatural prologue in which Jesus and angels gambol up the hill of the empty cross, and shots of everyday shantytown life as the credits roll. Jesus' ministry and death have led to a resistant, human community, to the sons of men (the film quotes Gen. 1.26) or, given the significant role of Mary and women, to the children of women.¹⁶⁰

Though my opening politically orientated comment might have framed our discussion around the political-economic aspects of the film's context, it did not. The students could not wait to engage with the religio-cultural dimensions of *Son of Man*. The class waited for those more familiar with the isiXhosa language and the amaXhosa culture to offer their contributions before they joined in. Helder Luis Carlos, from Mozambique, was itching to explore the political-economic elements of the film, but he too deferred to those from among the amaXhosa.

So my opening question was politely side-stepped, after a short respectful pause, and then Luxolo Gqomfa led us among the ways of the amaXhosa. What intrigued him and others was how the film begins, with Jesus portrayed as a young amaXhosa man in the final stages of the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Jesus is located among the *abakhwetha* (plural), the young men who are participating in the ritual of circumcision (*isiko lokwaluka*) as part of the process of being initiated into adulthood. Significantly, said Luxolo Gqomfa, the Jesus who confronts Satan is in the final stages of the ritual, signalled by his wearing of a blanket with a black border (though usually this blanket is only worn when the initiate is returning to his community as 'a man'). In the earlier stages of the ritual, when the circumcision was at its most painful and the *umkhwetha* (singular) most vulnerable to malign forces, the blanket worn by all initiates would have had a red border. But Jesus is now strong, having journeyed through most of circumcision ritual, and so is able to resist Satan.

The power of Satan is clear, for despite the white clay paint (*ifutha*) on the face of Jesus, designed to disguise and so protect the young initiate from the gaze of women (including his own mother) and recognition by evil spirits,

160 Walsh, et al., "Introduction," x–xii. This synopsis from the editors of a collection of essays on this film is offered as a rough guide to those who are either unfamiliar with the story of Jesus or the film *Son of Man*. See also the essays (and a number of them are by Africans) and appendices in Walsh, et al. eds, *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

Satan is able to locate Jesus when he is physically vulnerable and where he is isolated from his age-mates. But Jesus is spiritually strong, able to resist this witchcraft (*ukuthakatha*) and the temptations of Satan, portrayed here with a mixture of biblical (the snake tattoo) and amaXhosa (the goat's hoof) imagery. Though not that clear in these scenes, the young Jesus is carrying a stick (*intonga*) (though a rather slender one), which the *umkhwetha* always has to carry, as a way of covering the circumcision wound (*umkhondo wenyoka*, 'the place where the snake has passed'). Because he carries his *intonga* he is able to denounce the snake that is Satan. Though the initiation ritual is not quite complete, and though Jesus is alone, when Jesus proclaims, "This is my world", performatively Jesus 'becomes' a man, taking responsibility for his society.

But the film's focus on the individual, we thought, was somewhat discordant with amaXhosa culture. The circumcision ritual is a communal rite, and can only take place if there are a sufficient number of age-mates (*abakhwetha*) to form a cohort. Traditionally there is always a boy (*inqalathi*) who looks after the *umkhwetha*, and always accompanies him, so that if there is need he can summon the others. For the *umkhwetha* is always vulnerable (but perhaps not this one?). Here, we agreed, the film followed the biblical story, particularly the Markan version, with its emphasis on the individual. The locust image of the opening frame, conjuring up the lone figure of John the Baptist (Mark 1:6), fading into the frames of the lone Jesus (Mark 1:9), were however somewhat at odds with the communal invocations of amaXhosa culture.

This, and the next scene, introduced by Satan's refutation of Jesus' claim that "This is my world" with the rejoinder, "No, this is *my* world" (superimposed on the flames of political conflict), led our class into a brief discussion of Mark's emphasis on the individual. Mark's gospel is a staple of our Biblical Studies modules in the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the reasons we choose this gospel as our starting point is that it lends itself to an overtly political and economic reading of the story of Jesus.¹⁶¹ We had not noticed this individual emphasis of Mark (compared to the other gospels), and were a little disconcerted, worrying that the film's identification of this emphasis might play into the hands of the 'Church Theology' trajectory so prevalent in the South African context. We were relieved, we confessed, when the film entered more communal and so political territory.

But the setting of the social conflict took us a while to connect with. What kind of South Africa was this? South Africa is introduced, in English, with the

161 Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

words “Chaotic scenes in Judea this morning...”. What follows are a series of images of Black people fleeing, Black people carrying ‘traditional’ (sticks and knob-kerries) and modern (AK47s and other automatic) weapons, and Black people being spoken of and about by the quiet, confident, controlled omniscient English voice of a news-reader. While the images were familiar to us as the kinds of images one often saw on television reports from around the African continent, these were not South African images, at least not post-1994 South Africa. These images were familiar to us because this is how Africa is portrayed in the international media, whether it be the BBC or CNN. Though more BBC than CNN in terms of accent, the media clip within the film placed us for a moment outside of ‘our’ context. Having drawn us in through the opening images of a young amaXhosa man and the pervasive use the isiXhosa language, the language of Nelson Mandela, the television report now pushed us away from and outside of the South African context.

The “Channel 7 News” report did have familiar sounding elements in it. The notion of an African country being “split” by rival factions, with “internal” control being exercised by a local militia, and “democratic coalition” “insurgent” forces attempting to enforce “peace” in “the troubled region” are familiar ways of talking about African conflicts. We have heard these words and seen these images before. But not about South Africa (for even the post-apartheid ‘service-delivery protests’ and the December 2012 Marikana massacre were not this). And yet clearly the location is South Africa. Overtly South African images follow the Channel 7 News report. The yellow tee-shirt-wearing *toyitoying* young men of Herod’s militia, carrying a combination of traditional and more modern weapons, are reminiscent of areas of social conflict in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s. The region of what is now KwaZulu-Natal, north of the region portrayed in the film, was racked by violence in the mid-1980s, with apartheid state-sponsored groups loyal to the Inkatha paramilitary and political organisation attacking those who aligned themselves with the emerging United Democratic Front (UDF).¹⁶² Yellow was a colour common to Inkatha. Similar configurations of conflict were common to what is now the Cape Province, in a shack settlement known as Crossroads,¹⁶³ close to where much of the film is located, and where the amaXhosa predominate. But here the clothing colour associated with the apartheid state-sponsored faction was white.

¹⁶² Truluck, *No Blood on Our Hands* (Pietermaritzburg: Black Sash, 1993).

¹⁶³ Cole, *Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976–1986* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987).

So was the film set in a pre-liberation South Africa, with the son of man a Nelson Mandela-like figure, struggling to mediate between the apartheid state and its Black militia surrogates on the one side and the various external insurgent liberation movements, including the African National Congress, on the other side? Or was the film set in a post-liberation South Africa, with the dream of the 'new' South Africa and its "rainbow nation" in tatters? While we watched our fears that the film was about the latter were confirmed. We feared that this film was one more example of Afro-pessimism.

The Rwandan genocide-like scene that follows,¹⁶⁴ with Mary hiding among the corpses of slaughtered children piled in a school classroom, seemed to confirm our suspicions that this was a film about another failed attempt by Africans to govern themselves in peace. And while we South Africans would have argued that more could have been done since liberation, particularly in the areas of education and housing (two key early image-sets in the film), this was not our country that we were watching. And while there are worrying signs that international syndicates are extending their tentacles into our country, recruiting local gangsters to do their bidding, and that the South African military and police were sometimes rather heavy-handed in responding to legitimate service-delivery protests, these are not pervasive 'signs of the times'. So we were surprised that the writers and director of this film should hold such a bleak view of our future. We had no doubt that the devil walked among those who desecrated schools with the corpses of children, but worried about this as a vision of our post-apartheid country.

We loved the concept of the school being the site for the annunciation. Surely this is what education should be, a site of a new vision for the new South Africa. Fortunately there are signs that our government is serious about transforming out education system, moving firmly beyond the pedagogical models of apartheid "Bantu Education" and into forms of education that offer equal opportunities for all our people, even the poorest. But we did lament the slow pace of educational reform. So situating the magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) in a shack settlement school classroom was a bold move, and one we applauded (though we could not forget the corpses piled in the background).

We also rather liked the way in which Mary's song encompasses both the school and the coastal area where we had first encountered the young Jesus. Mary, it seemed, was reiterating the words of the young Jesus, "This is my world". Another sign of transformation was that Joseph was walking with a knob-kerrie-type stick, the kind of stick (*intonga*) used by all rural amaXhosa men. He was using it as a means of support for his family and himself, its

164 George, "Hotel Rwanda," (2004).

traditional use, which was in stark contrast to the earlier images in which this same kind of stick had been used as a weapon of violence. The ‘traditional weapon’ of the 1980s was returned to its primal use, and foreshadowed other transformations—or so we hoped.

The journey of Mary and Joseph (and Jesus) along the coast and rural roads into the town was a familiar one to all of us. The South African economy, like most African colonial-based economies, was an economy of extraction, built on migrant labour, with African men commodified to fit. Joseph follows a well-worn path, from the rural areas of the Eastern Province (the traditional home of the amaXhosa) to the shack settlements of the Western Cape, in search of work in the areas around Cape Town. What is strange, from a South African perspective, is that Mary accompanies him. Under apartheid wives and children were not permitted to accompany their men to the cities. So this was another indication that we were watching a post-apartheid film.

Throughout the film we were struck by the presence of children. Clearly children are part of the film’s and the *Son of Man*’s message. The corpses of the opening scenes are replaced by running and smiling children as Mary enters the town on a donkey-cart. Not only was it a relief to see the faces of happy children, and not only did the donkey cart clearly locate the film in the rural and peri-urban areas of the Eastern and Western Cape, where the donkey-cart is a primary means of transporting goods among the rural poor, but the donkey of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is redeployed here. Matthew’s two donkeys are acknowledged (Matthew 21:2), and the “unused” donkey of Mark (11:2) and Luke (19:30) is reworked into a well-used donkey, transporting a woman.

The communal dimension of the *Son of Man*, we were relieved to see, was becoming more evident. The local community shares its resources with Mary and Joseph and Jesus. The violence of Herods’ militia is palpable, but so is the solidarity of the community, extending from the donkey-cart to the queue to the ‘back-room’ of the shack that is offered to them. Soon this shack is surrounded by children, both ordinary and angelic. Live goats take the place of the cloven hoof carried by Satan, and the choral song of children takes the place of the militant chant of the *toyi-toyi*. African child-soldiers are transformed into African herders and angels. Transformation is imminent, and children are central to this transformation.

“Today we are united, we are one people” is the angels’ refrain, and this, the images make clear, includes the animals. African people and their communal and holistic way of life are celebrated, even if the reality of poverty remains. Indeed, poverty can only be overcome, the film seems to say, through community. ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’; a person is a person because of people. Even far from their rural home, Mary and her family find community. The

nuclear family becomes the extended family in the shed behind the shack, as two other women join Mary and Joseph. For, of course, African women do not give birth alone, and neither would Mary, though this is not a feature reflected in the gospels.

Back in his rural home, Jesus grows up in a fairly traditional rural way, surrounded by the soil and small-scale animal husbandry of subsistence farming, wearing, like all children from poor communities, clothes that are too big for him, providing lots of room for growth. True to traditional rural life, Jesus is also surrounded by the other women of the village. True too to this world, adult men are absent, having migrated to the cities in search of work, for the rural economy is often not adequate to the demands of modern life (reflected in the power-lines that run through the village). Sadly, Jesus the child is deprived by the film makers of other children to play with; instead, he seems a solitary lad, with only an angel to play with.

Our class wondered why more was not made of the visit by 'the three wise-men'. Having constructed the wise-men as foreigners, from the Kingdom of Lesotho perhaps, given their blankets, hats, and horses, the film does little with the fairly widespread problem of xenophobia in South Africa. As an economic magnet to our African neighbours, South Africa has a steady influx of economic migrants, and the competition in poor communities for scarce resources, including housing and employment, often leads to conflict, sometimes expressed in xenophobic terms. The presence of these BaSotho strangers, juxtaposed with the command to register—to obtain a valid South African immigration or identity document in our current context—is fertile ground for a Jesus who embraces every ethnicity. Instead, the 'foreigners/*amakwerekwere*' disappear from our view.

Fleeing the devil, who is present in rural as well as urban areas, Joseph leads his family, following Matthew (2:19), in search of safety. The machetes and AK47s, emblems of the conflict in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (not South Africa), are soon joined by other familiar images of Africa (but not South Africa), as Joseph and his family join columns of refugees, carrying what little they own, forever vulnerable to marauding militias. Another slaughter of children takes place, but the motivation in the movie is not clear. The implied logic of the biblical narrative seems enough for the film at this point. Why would a local militia kill boy children? The 'normal' practice in conflict zones is to take boy children and train them as child-soldiers. The biblical narrative dominates here, leaving us unsure of how the social conflict in this film is being constructed. What is the message of the film? We were not sure yet. Those of us watching together were looking for something more than a retelling of the gospel story, superficially clothed in (caricatured) African

images. African conflicts are not simply random and gratuitous acts of 'Black on Black' violence; they are driven by economic, ethnic, and religious dynamics. By not providing context-based motivation for some of the action, the film faced the danger of sliding into all too familiar caricatures of (South) Africa as 'the dark continent'. Mary's cry as she looks at yet another pile of the corpses of children of "Why?" is our question too. The biblical narrative cannot tell our story unless it becomes more contextual, and the film is light on context here.

For the second time in the film, and for the first time in his young life, as we return to the opening scene, Jesus refuses the temptation to be anything but an agent within and of this, his, world. "This is my world", he reiterates, surrounded by his age-mates. Quite what was meant by this proclamation was something we were looking forward to seeing. And the first indication in the film is a powerful one, recovering a communal dimension by returning to the opening scene of Jesus the young initiate, but including now his age-mates. The communal and collaborative dimension of the *Son of Man's* message is now given more force.

Becoming a man, and becoming a source for social transformation, is a community project, the film seems to be saying. Interestingly, the film gives significant prominence to women and young men in this process. Traditionally, it is older men who control and shape the circumcision ritual, and while an old man is given a small role at this point in the film (saying, "We will eat together. You are men now."), older men are generally in the background throughout the film. It is as if the struggle for social transformation is in the hands of women and younger men.

Jesus takes leave of his mother in the way that many young men do, setting off to search for work in the urban centres. The song sung by male voices in the background is a traditional song, saying "We men are going to look for cattle/calves". The song, interestingly, is sung in isiZulu, not isiXhosa, but the sense is the same.¹⁶⁵ These young men are expressing their new independence of their parents, setting out to find work, so that they too, like their ancestors, can build a herd of cattle, a sign of prosperity and dignity, and heralding the promise of marriage and children. Jesus, now a man (*indoda*), is joined by three of his age-mates, somewhat awkwardly introduced by captions as Peter, James, and John (just in case we had not realised that we are watching a story about Jesus). And so Jesus gathers his disciples, with the core consisting of his rural age-mates (and so explaining rather nicely the privileging of these three in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 10:2, 17:1; Mark 5:37, 9:2, 13:3, 14:33; Luke 6:14,

165 For these and many other cultural and linguistic insights I am grateful to Luxolo Gqomfa. The mixing of local languages is common in South African urban centres.

8:51, 9:28)). The other disciples come from a range of social sectors of South African society, but all from the margins. The film even re-members some of the male disciples as women, with Simon becoming Simone and Phillip becoming Phillippa (and Thaddaeus becoming Thaddea). The inclusiveness of Jesus's project seems to be an important part of the film's message.

The casting of Judas as the gun supplier to local militia/gangsters seems a little predictable, preparing the viewer for a fairly traditional motivation for the betrayal. More interesting is the portrayal of the temple leadership as gangsters. The synoptic gospels' use of the phrase "den of robbers" to describe the temple leadership (Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46) is firmly echoed here. But would the economic dimensions of the formative Jesus project (so evident in Mark's account) be taken up in the film, we wondered. Prevailing uses of the Bible in South Africa gave us cause to worry.¹⁶⁶

With Jesus having gathered his disciples from the margins of South African society, the film now introduces the 'opposition'. Via another English language television report we are informed of a new alliance, the "Judean Provisional Government", bringing together senior gangsters (from Herod's militia), and the military forces of the "Democratic Coalition". Simplifying African conflicts in this way tends towards caricature. One of the remarkable realities of the South African transition is that the military has remained accountable to the state, serving the new democratic state much as it had served the apartheid state. And while the South African Police Service has had its share of "rogue cops" in partnership with organised crime, this has not been the norm. So why portray South Africa in this way? Is this the future the writers and director see for us under a Black government?

A shift worth noting is that Black people also speak English! It is not only the disembodied white reporter who speaks English on television; the Governor of the Democratic Coalition also speaks English. What is the significance of this? We were not sure. Is this a residue of 'whiteness' finding a place in the film, or is this the lurking presence of 'white' neo-liberal global capitalism? The absence of race in a film set in South Africa remained a worry for us. Why set the film in an entirely Black, socially conflicted, and war-torn South Africa? Is this what happens when Blacks take control? We all found this generic, Black African, apocalyptic African setting rather disconcerting. Why not have the Son of Man engage with the 'real' South Africa? What would the Son of Man do and say in our contemporary South African context, we wondered.

Clearly this last question was not considered by the (South African) writers and directors. Instead we have this caricature of an African state, ruled by an

166 See the discussion in the next chapter.

insurgent army and local gangsters. Given the contextual choice the film has made, what is the message of the *Son of Man* for this apocalyptic context? As Jesus begins to teach and preach we catch a (muddled) glimpse.

The speech, in English, of the Governor is intended to be ironic, with the usual slogans for dictatorial military rule: “restoring the rule of law”, “an interim government”, “this new government will ensure that the genuine wishes of the majority of the people are represented”, “when these elections are held, and peace is restored, then my forces and I can withdraw from your country”. It is against the background of this speech that we first hear Jesus debating with his disciples, in a shack, with children playing outside.

The debate seems to be about three related matters. First, do we negotiate with the ruling alliance, given its corrupt nature? Second, what form should our resistance take? And third, what are the root causes of our social situation? Jesus takes a fairly moderate stance on the first two, arguing that as “the occupiers and elders” have blamed the people for the violence, so their form of resistance must be non-violent. Once we have proved to them, he continues, that we are committed to non-violent change, then negotiations can begin. On the third matter, the root causes of their social struggle, he is more political, the root cause of the “unrest” is “poverty, overcrowding and lack of education”. “We must not let ourselves be corrupted”, he urges, “but rather fight poverty, epidemics and thuggery”.

Clearly the most controversial of his arguments, given our history, is the call to non-violence, but Jesus is adamant, “Each human life is important”. Slowly and reluctantly the disciples give up their weapons. Flashbacks to the child-soldier executing people with (*The Killing Fields*-type) plastic bags over their heads,¹⁶⁷ again make us wonder what kind of South Africa this is. Haunting as the image is, it is not one of ours. But the next image is one of ours. The young woman, from John 8, about to be ‘necklaced’, is an image we are familiar with. All that is missing in this scene is the car tyre dowsed in petrol around her neck. The petrol and the lighter are there, and so is the violence of the mob. South Africans expect an intervention, not from Jesus, but from Desmond Tutu. The point is powerfully made, for Desmond Tutu is one of the few South African leaders who had an overt position on non-violence, and he is remembered for his intervention in preventing a woman from being ‘necklaced’.¹⁶⁸ For while various forms of non-violent direct action were adopted in the struggle against apartheid, this was always a minority position. Each of the liberation movements had a military wing, even if for some this was a reluctant component of

167 Joffé, “The Killing Fields,” (1984).

168 See Cowell, “Bishop Tutu Saves Man from Crowd,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1985.

their organisation.¹⁶⁹ So the Jesus movement of the film is taking a distinctly different position on violence.

What is also different in this scene of the saving the woman from being necklaced is that again the biblical narrative dominates. She is an adulteress, as in John 8. Necklacing, however, was reserved for those accused of collaboration with the apartheid state. It was a political act. Would this Jesus have stood alongside Desmond Tutu, preventing mob justice taking its course, if this was someone accused of collaboration with the corrupt interim government? Probably, but 'our' South African narrative is subordinated here to the biblical narrative. We were also not sure about why it is the military who disperse the crowd, not Jesus. What is clear is that by returning her jewellery the disciples are rejecting becoming corrupted.

The rejection of corruption is an important element in the *Son of Man's* message, and one that resounds in our current South African context. Corruption is a major talking point across our communities, as we watch those we have elected to public office plundering our state resources. The endemic corruption of the apartheid state remains an enduring legacy. More worrying, however, and receiving less attention from either the movie or South African public realm are the systemic dimensions of macro-economic corruption. We, like the movie, have tended to ignore the deeper systemic and structural causes of corruption by focussing on the personal moral dimensions of corruption. The tendency has been to ask religion to address the former, but not the latter.¹⁷⁰

For now the film follows the woman saved from necklacing, and in a fairly daring move has her buy her perfume from a store that clearly sells traditional medicines. Here is another element in the film's message, foregrounding the African-ness of the Jesus movement (and so of African Christianity). The opening scene which clearly locates Jesus within traditional amaXhosa society, the emphasis on the circumcision rite of passage, the importance of age-mates and the village community, and many others signs of a continuity between culture and Christian faith are key features of the film. It was these aspects of the film that were the focus of attention of my students. Like African biblical scholarship generally,¹⁷¹ questions of inculturation are at the forefront of their engagement with the Bible.

169 Couper, *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).

170 See the discussion in the next chapter.

171 Ukpong, "Rereading the Bible with African Eyes," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995).

The wedding scene is another daring inclusion. In their earlier social analysis Jesus and his disciples had identified “epidemics” as a site of their struggle. For any South African or African the allusion to HIV and AIDS is clear. And yet in the film so far there is no other mention of this reality. As South Africans we attend far more funerals than we do weddings, as Mzwakhe Mbuli reminds in his haunting song, “Song of the Spirit”. So including a wedding is a form of resistance in itself. At this moment in the movie the gospel narrative and our South African narrative connect in a powerful way. Celebrating a wedding in the midst of social conflict is an act of defiance and resistance. So too is the slow inclusion of the ‘fallen’ woman, whom the film includes in among the wedding guests.

“Think of our struggle”, Judas chastises Jesus as the perfume this woman has bought is used to anoint his feet. This *is* our struggle, seems to be the response of Jesus, though not in such overt terms. Jesus, from our perspective, here misses an opportunity to connect with two important issues in our context, that of the taboo about talking about sex and that of how we should use scarce resources in the struggle for ongoing social transformation. Significantly, perhaps, in the movie it is a woman in traditional dress who makes the first move to include the stigmatised woman. There are traditional cultural resources, the film might be saying, for drawing those who are stigmatised and discriminated against back into community. Our religious traditions have much to learn from this simple act of inclusion, for our churches are full of ‘fallen’ young women, whether pregnant or HIV-positive, being forced to sit in the back row of pews (unaccompanied by their male partners). The church is not a safe place for ‘fallen’ women, as the *Siyaphila* support groups know only too well. Even our liberation theologies are unprepared and ill-equipped to do “indecent theology”.¹⁷² The *Son of Man* makes a start, with the women literally “having done with their pride”, as they confess in their song, moving from a pride that excludes to a compassion that includes.

In this wedding scene Jesus uses the term “comrade” to address Judas. This, and the gradual shift to working-class clothes for the disciples and Jesus, seems to invoke an economic dimension to the film’s message. Jesus picks up our worries about an undue focus on personal morality in his next address, following the first step in Judas’ betrayal. Armed, literally, with a newly acquired video-recorder, Judas offers us an insight into the deliberations of Jesus and the disciples. This is a rather nice way of taking up the gospel of Mark’s emphasis

172 Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2009).

on an insider group of Jesus and a small group of disciples. The reader/viewer eavesdrops on insider caucusing and instruction. And what we hear is what those of us who stand within the liberation trajectory of African biblical scholarship have been yearning to hear from this film. “We are too busy with moral trivialities, as if they are the most important things”, Jesus teaches, explaining that this focus risks deflecting the movement from “the struggle against real sin”. “All authority is not divinely instituted”, he continues, echoing the analysis of the landmark *The Kairos Document*, according to which sin can be systemic and structural as well as individual and personal, and according to which Romans 13 should not be understood as providing theological legitimation for the apartheid state.¹⁷³ But like so much else in this film, there is no depth to the social or theological analysis. Significant and suggestive scraps are our fare.

We continued, however, to see much in this film that affirmed the continuity between African culture and Christian faith. The sermon in the shack makes this clear: “I’m not here to destroy beliefs and traditions, but create them anew”. Those in the class who lean towards the inculturation trajectory for African biblical scholarship nodded their assent, recognising in the Jesus of the gospels and the film someone who sought to recover and ‘redeem’ traditional religion and culture. And for the first time in the film there was also something for us to engage with from the perspective of African post-colonial biblical hermeneutics, as Jesus says: “When those with imperial histories pretend to forget them, and blame Africa’s problems on tribalism and corruption while building themselves new economic empires, I say we have been lied to”. But who is Jesus referring to here, we wondered? There are no white South Africans, and the only other European or western presence is the disembodied English voice of the television news reports. The European empires that have plundered Africa in the past, and the American empire and its multinational collaborators that continue with the neo-colonial capitalist exploitation of our continent are nowhere to be found in this film. They are invisible. Or is Jesus referring to the ‘African’ neo-colonial forces of the English speaking Democratic Coalition of the film? And if so, who do they represent in our contemporary context? We were confused, and for those of us who have watched the film again and again, we remain confused. For the film seems to represent South African as another failed African state, beset with African tribalism and corruption. Or, is the film doing something extremely subtle here, portraying a Jesus who confronts the film’s own African stereotypes?

173 Kairos, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986).

While it is true that the African elites of many African states have taken over rather than transformed colonial economies of extraction,¹⁷⁴ these African neo-colonial forms of government are not quite the same as “those with imperial histories”, who are here invoked by Jesus, who “pretend to forget them”. Perhaps we were expecting too much from this film in terms of social analysis. The rapid shift to “torture” in “the Middle East” and “child labour” in “Asia” and “trade subsidies” in “Europe and the USA”, all in a sermon in a South African shack, seemed to indicate a rather cursory analysis of our global(ised) condition. The film is not, unfortunately, offering in-depth social analysis of South Africa. But we did agree with the refrain, “Evil did not fall”, even if we were puzzled by what the time reference might refer to. Was the film saying that evil did not fall with the liberation of South Africa, hence the ongoing unrest within the not-so-new South Africa (after all the whites have fled)?¹⁷⁵

And what did Jesus mean when he said that “Evil *will* fall”? Was this a neo-Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic affirmation of personal healing and salvation, as the healing of the paralysed young man in the movie might signify? Or was this something deeper, about the ‘saving’ in broader social terms of the youth of our country? The numerous images of children in the streets of the shack settlement gave us hope that this was what Jesus meant. The brief sermon at the sea, near Lazarus’s shack, affirmed the goodness of each person and a commitment to collaborative leadership, all signs that Jesus was not calling for a form of what *The Kairos Document* called “Church Theology”. We were relieved, for a moment, but became worried again when Jesus raised Lazarus from a closed coffin, a clear indication that the person had died of an AIDS related illness, for otherwise the coffin would have been open, as is the custom in African communities. The ravages of an AIDS-related death have changed this custom, and so at many funerals the coffin is closed, with a photograph of the deceased placed on top. The gesture of Jesus placing his hand on the dead man’s face was all too reminiscent of tele-evangelists and Christian faith healers. How irresponsible, we reflected, in the context of HIV and AIDS. For we live in a context where the church buries those who have been ‘healed’ of HIV by Christian faith-healers and traditional healers, and where some pastors implore those taking antiretroviral therapy (ARVs) to stop taking them as a sign of their faith in God’s and the man-of-God’s healing power.

174 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 4–6; Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 14–14, 422–423.

175 This is the scenario in Eben Venter’s bleak post-liberation apocalyptic novel on South Africa—a South African *Heart of Darkness*; Venter, *Trencherman* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008).

The rainbow of new life after rain (conjuring again the new South African dream of “the rainbow people of God” invoked by both Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu)¹⁷⁶ and the mural of the raising of the dead seemed to mix messages. And what of the exorcism? Faith-healing is such an important part of our religious context. Most of the African Independent/Initiated Churches (AICs) are ‘healing’ churches, and healing forms a part of most Pentecostal-Charismatic and even most ‘mainline’ churches. And yet ordinary pastors from each of these African Christian traditions will confess that now, in the context of HIV and AIDS, “We pray, but we cannot heal”.¹⁷⁷ While they find it impossible to proclaim this from their pulpits, they are desperate to find another way, theologically, to come to terms with HIV and AIDS. This film offers them little; and what it does offer is a well-worn path to another funeral. Judas may use his film of these ‘healings’ to betray Jesus, but ‘the gospel’ has already been betrayed by this Jesus, for it offers little ‘good news’ to those struggling to live with HIV.

As the surveillance of Jesus tightens, so we watched more carefully to see if the sermon on the VIP toilet (Ventilated Improved Pit latrine) would offer anything different. Like “the elders” we wanted to see if Jesus would take up the political and economic challenges of his and our context. It started well, with Jesus affirming collective dialogue and action. While armed soldiers loiter in the background and a military helicopter hovers overhead, Jesus says (in isiXhosa, and Jesus only ever speaks isiXhosa), “My people, we have deliberately chosen to operate openly. Let us work together, because through collective dialogue we can penetrate the deafest of ears”. As the crowd roars its approval, he continues, saying, “It feels like we are defeated. We need to act like a movement to ensure that each of us is treated with dignity”. Again, the crowd roars its approval. Jesus continues, saying, “Let us unite. Solidarity! Unity!” The crowd embraces this call, breaking into collaborative song and dance, led by rhythmic drumming on a rubbish bin. This collective action draws more soldiers, and the order is given to disperse. Some of the crowd begin to move away, but one of the disciples (Peter) picks up a lump of concrete and advances on the soldiers. Jesus instructs him to drop the concrete, but makes it clear to the soldiers by his stance and stare that they are not backing down. Glaring down at them from on top of the toilet Jesus stands with feet apart and arms flexed at his side. He then climbs down from the toilet, slowly. Once on the ground

176 See the discussion in the next chapter.

177 Haddad, “‘We Pray but We Cannot Heal’: Theological Challenges Posed by the HIV/AIDS Crisis,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 125 (2006).

he pauses, confronting the soldiers with his dignity, before turning his back on them and joining the crowd.

His invocation of a “movement” among the shack dwellers resonated with us, for one of the most significant post-apartheid social movements in South Africa today is *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (the people who live in shacks), and they are particularly well organised in the Western Cape province, where the film is set. The movement’s key demand “is for ‘Land & Housing in the City’ but it has also successfully politicised and fought for an end to forced removals and for access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, health care and refuse removal as well as bottom up popular democracy”.¹⁷⁸ This social movement has publically confronted the African National Congress (ANC)-led government, using the slogan: “No land, no house, no vote”.¹⁷⁹ So, we wondered, was the film a warning to the ANC Alliance government? Was the film forecasting the collapse of our rainbow nation if the children and women of our shack settlements were not “treated with dignity” (to use the words of Jesus) and to pick up on the key concept of ‘dignity’ within the discourse of *Abahlali*?¹⁸⁰ But no political or economic manifesto is proclaimed by the Son of Man standing on the VIP toilet, not even a version of Luke 4:16–21. Jesus is interrupted and his disciples are dispersed by the military before we hear any more about ‘the project’ of this social movement. All that is confirmed is his stance on non-violent-direct-action.

The “got him” of Judas, as he hands over the video evidence to the elders rings somewhat hollow. They (and we) were looking for a political (and economic) project. But there has been little evidence of this so far. The mythology of Jesus spreads, from shack wall to shack wall, and so does the violence. The people are not as patient as Jesus. The African-English voice of the ruling regime imposes “martial law”, perhaps an echo of the apartheid state’s 1985 State of Emergency (to which *The Kairos Document* was a response) or perhaps a ‘prophecy’ of how the Jacob Zuma-led government has sometimes reacted to the increasing numbers of service-delivery protests in our townships and shack settlements across the country. Perhaps it is a foreseeing of the Marikana massacre that was to come. In both cases the television footage of police responses looks awfully similar to television footage of the apartheid state’s response

¹⁷⁸ <http://abahlali.org/>.

¹⁷⁹ Abahlali’s ‘open-letter’ film to Nelson Mandela, titled, “Dear Mandela” won the category of Best Documentary at the 2012 Brooklyn Film Festival.

¹⁸⁰ West, “Contending for Dignity in the Bible and the Post-Apartheid South African Public Realm,” in *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (eds. Claassens and Birch; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

to anti-apartheid protests. Military force against African people in the name of “democracy”, “order” and “peace” are all too familiar, but where do they fit in our South African chronology? Or they simply endemic and generic to African states?

So much of the film is suggestive, but it is frustratingly difficult to locate the film within our current context. Is this Son of Man of this movie really a South African son of man? The echoes are everywhere in this film, but finding a coherent biblical or contextual trajectory is difficult. Perhaps all it is offering is ‘prophet fragments’.¹⁸¹

The women’s lament, outside the offices of the governor of the Democratic Coalition, “Stop killing our children”, belongs in 1976, as the apartheid forces shot Black school children protesting against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. Or is the film, again, being more subtle, arguing that our youth are vulnerable in so many ways, and that our future lies in caring for them? Is this overt violence against the children a metaphor for a whole range of structural forms of violence that threaten our children? If so, then of course we join the women, laying our own children symbolically on the “STOP” signs of the street. “An injury to one is an injury to all” is a slogan common to worker’s organisations around the world, but has a particular poignancy in South Africa, as the 1950s slogan of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and a slogan under which millions of South Africans have marched, including the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) on the 9th August 1956 as part of the Defiance Campaign against the apartheid pass laws.¹⁸²

By liturgically ‘abandoning’ or ‘sacrificing’ their children on the street in the path of Jesus, perhaps the women are doing as the biblical Rizpah did, who shamed David the king (2 Samuel 21:1–14), here shaming Jesus or the South African church to do more to redeem our children and so our land. Women make up the vast majority of our churches, but patriarchy controls the church. Perhaps this is why older men are so absent in this film, and why “the elders” has been shifted from an honorific term (as it is in traditional African culture) to a synonym for corruption and violence. Perhaps, the film is saying, ‘stopping’ African patriarchy and African patrimonialism should be at the core of the African Jesus project?

For the film lingers, from now on, on Mary. She becomes its central figure, so perhaps the other famous South African women’s slogan is foundational to this film: “*Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo*” (You strike a woman, you strike

181 West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

182 Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1982).

a rock). African women's biblical hermeneutics has taken up this slogan, popularised during the Defiance Campaign, and redeployed alongside post-colonial biblical hermeneutics.¹⁸³ The Mary of the latter part of the film embodies this slogan. Jesus may be lifted up by the crowds (a majority of whom are women), but it is Mary who will be their rock and who will lead them from lament to protest. Is it on this rock (and not the male and somewhat ineffective Peter) that the new South African church will be built?

The pace of the film picks up as Jesus rejects an offer of "power sharing", even though it is couched in the form of "us" (the elders) against "them" (the occupiers). Who in our new South Africa is the 'us' and who the 'them' is not clear. Jesus simply affirms the voice of everyone, even those in the minority. Is this some kind of call to 'minority politics', recognising the fragmentation of South Africa's political project? Does the film advocate social movements (like *Abahlali baseMjondolo*) over against organised political parties (like the ANC)? Is this why *Abahlali baseMjondolo* is so threatening to the South African state and why the Jesus movement was so threatening to the Judean elites of his day, and why the Son of Man is so threatening to the elders and the democratic coalition—that they will not be co-opted by power? Clearly this is the 'political' act that the elders have been looking for; ironically, it is the refusal to engage in mainstream politics that is so 'political'. Interestingly, both the governor and the elders speak English as they plot to 'disappear' the Son of Man. Whiteness lurks in the background, but is never 'outed'.¹⁸⁴

But, it would seem, patriarchy is being outed. It is Mary, in the film, who prepares the 'last supper' for Jesus and his disciples. Ironically, she is in the kitchen! The echoes of the Defiance Campaign resound, for when twenty thousand women of all races marched on the Union Buildings in 1956 they challenged the notion that a woman's place is in the kitchen. Her place, they said, is everywhere! And Mary is everywhere, including the kitchen.

The film follows the 'passion' in fairly orthodox terms, though the setting is deeply evocative of the margins of our society. Satan and the angels reappear, after a rather lengthy absence, signalling a return to more 'spiritual'

183 Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Postcolonial *Imbokodo* Reading of the Story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–16)," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (eds. de Wit and West; Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008); see also Nadar, "Wathint'abafazi Wathint'imbokodo!—the Son of Woman in the *Son of Man* as an Embodiment of the Struggle for Justice," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

184 Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

significations. Mary remains our link to the political. But before we follow Mary, we have to endure a Mel-Gibson-Passion-of-the-Christ-type beating of Jesus. As in Gibson's film,¹⁸⁵ this Jesus too goads the gangsters to beat him more and more, retorting to the one who threatens to kill him, "How long with it take you?" Propitiatory notions of the atonement, it seems, are a sign of our theological times. But these bloody scenes were redeemed for us by what we hoped was an intended allusion to the death of the Steve Bantu Biko, one of the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement.¹⁸⁶ Having beaten Jesus, the authorities throw Jesus into a *bakkie* (a van), which is similar to what happened to Steve Biko in 1977. Having been repeatedly beaten in police detention in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Province (the home region of the Son of Man, and Steve Biko's home region as well), Biko was transported, through the night, to Pretoria in the back of a Land Rover *bakkie*, a distance of over seven hundred miles (more than a thousand kilometres), in order, allegedly, to receive medical treatment. Clearly, as the film portrays, the devil was at work on that night. If the allusion is to the death of Biko, then our sense that the film might be about the importance of social movements, like the Black Consciousness Movement, and the dignity of the (Black) individual gained sustenance. Is the film calling for a return to a 'movement' centred on Black dignity?

As Jesus is being buried, the new interim government is being interviewed, in isiXhosa, not English. Even this vestige of invisible whites is now not present. There is no doubt that this moment in the film is about Black Africans. But we were no clearer about what kind of South Africa is being imagined here. A Black African led interim government is working closely with Black African coalition forces. Where does this fit? Not in South Africa. Perhaps the images of so much of the film are from Sierra Leone, or Liberia, or the Ivory Coast, where child-soldiers have been part of the landscape and regional coalition military forces of organisations like ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States) work with local militias to establish democratic rule. But why then import these images to South Africa, unless the writers and director of this film imagine a similar fate for us?

The film lurches, following a not so clear narrative line, to questions being raised by a journalist, first in isiXhosa to the leader/s of the interim government and then in English to the governor of the coalition, about "the occupiers" role. It would seem that the death of Jesus, one more youth ("They are killing our youth!", a woman cries), has mobilised the shack settlement. But why focus on the 'occupying' coalition and not the interim 'gangster' government? If the

185 Gibson, "The Passion of the Christ," (2004).

186 Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004).

former represents the (external) Roman empire's Pilate and the latter the (internal) Judean temple elite, then the film shifts the emphasis found in the gospels. But then again this 'Jesus' film does not seem to follow with any consistency a particular gospel tradition.¹⁸⁷ It is a thorough re-membering.

As an effigy of the governor of the coalition is being necklaced, the plot takes an important turn, as the 'converted' gangster "Hundred" informs Mary, the mother, where her son is buried. Jesus becomes the son of this woman, not the Son of Man. Indeed, Jesus becomes the son of all the many thousands of South African women who to this day do not know where their sons, detained and killed by the apartheid regime, are buried. The gospel narrative, never consistently sustained, now flickers and fades as another narrative takes over. Mary's wail on learning of her son's death is beautifully juxtaposed by the silent Mary who sits at his wasteland grave. Something significant is about to happen, and does, as Mary, a Xhosa woman, begins to open up the grave. This is truly shocking, for women are not permitted to touch the grave (and if they do can be considered a witch (*umthakhati*)). Equally shocking is that she is immediately received into her community. What a remarkably inclusive response, we thought, to someone who would be an outcaste, in terms of traditional African culture. 'There are no outcastes', might be part of the message of the film. Perhaps, as Luxolo Gqomfa said, "In the eyes of the poor, culture is not a determining factor, solidarity or unity [key terms in the film] prevail over cultural orthodoxy".

In an iconic reminder of Hector Pieterse's dead body being carried by a fellow student on the 16th June 1976, Mary cradles her son's body while sitting on the back of the *bakkie*. The student uprising of 1976 has become a women's uprising in this movie. There is no resurrection for the Son of Man or for the son of Mary; but there is a rising up of the women of South Africa. And unlike the gospel of Mark's women (16:8), these women are not afraid. Men are included, in the tradition of African feminism,¹⁸⁸ but it is women who lead. "The land is covered in darkness", Mary laments, joined by other women and then men. Slowly the lament becomes more militant, shifting to protest, and then to revolution. Men take centre-stage for a moment, *toyi-toying* and singing anti-apartheid songs, demanding that the army "*voetsak*" (fuck-off, go away). But while some of the men do disperse, as instructed by the military, it is

187 See a reconstruction of how each particular biblical gospel is used in Staley, "Appendix 2: A Gospel Harmony," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

188 Okure, "Feminist Interpretation in Africa," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction* (ed. Fiorenza; New York: Crossroads, 1993).

Mary who looks into the eyes of these her other African sons and shames them. Drawing inspiration from the life of her dead son, she advances on the young African soldiers, singing again, "The land is covered in darkness". Elements of the *toyi-toyi* remain, but this is now a new song for a new moment and movement. The darkness that covers the land in the gospels (Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44) is reconfigured by Mary, who like the lamenting Job "is not silenced by the darkness" (23:17). Darkness abounds, but Mary summons us to a militant, resisting, lament. The angelic children, at last, as they desired, have Jesus among them. We are left with Mary and the other women of South Africa, who, like Rizpah (2 Samuel 21), care for the dead and in so doing shame the forces of patriarchy, political dictatorship, and military power.

But the film is not finished. As the credits roll, a young child walks, watched over by his mother/a woman, and Genesis 1 is invoked: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'". Perhaps the message of the film is not so much the message of the Son of Man (Jesus), but the message that every child is divine, a son/daughter of God.

Following this film was not easy, even after some of us watched it a few times. There was much that resonated with us and we were often drawn to the detail of the film. But it was not easy to track the film through the gospels, or to find a clear ideo-theological appropriation of the biblical narratives. But the most enduring concern about the film was what it seemed to say about our future. While the struggle in South Africa does continue, we were nowhere near this bleak vision of our future. And if the writers and director do imagine this as our destiny, their 'solution' too is far from clear. Is non-violence in itself enough? What about substantive macro-economic structural change? And while the women of our land are the rocks of our personal and national lives, is it enough to be led by them as they sing militant songs of lament, calling for change, but with no clear vision of what this change should include, other than that we care for our children?

It is these multifarious Southern African realities that summon the Bible to speak. Not as constrained as African churches or African academics, the arts in Southern Africa are sites in which African peoples and African contexts contend for the significance of the Bible, recognising that it too is a contested terrain. These examples from Southern African popular culture represent what *The Kairos Document* referred to as "people's theology",¹⁸⁹ which is a confluence

189 Kairos, *The Kairos Document*, 34–35, note 15.

of local incipient expressions of an engagement between African contexts,¹⁹⁰ mediating ideo-theological frameworks, and the Bible.

Though part of the South African public realm, each of these examples is personal to a particular artist, though shaped by the communities that constitute them. In the next chapter we turn to more public appropriations of the Bible.

190 Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

The Public Bible

I am certain that many in this auditorium have been asking themselves the question why I have referred so insistently on the Christian Holy Scriptures. Let me explain.¹

Since its arrival in Southern Africa, the Bible has been a site of struggle, though often in more complex ways than most post-colonial analysis has acknowledged. This chapter reiterates some of that history but focuses on the period after political liberation, from 1994 to the present, examining the place of the Bible in the South African public realm more than two decades after liberation. In particular, this chapter examines the re-emergence of the Bible in the context of shifts in South African macro-economic policy, with the Bible playing a significant though unlikely role.

The history of South Africa over the past three and half centuries has been “a history of inequality”. In his economic analysis of South Africa from 1652–2002 under this title, Sampie Terreblanche provides a detailed account of the systemic relationship between power, land, and labour in South Africa.² He identifies a number of successive systemic periods in South African history, beginning with “the mercantilistic and feudal system institutionalised by Dutch colonialism during the second half of the 17th and most of the 18th century (1652–1795)”.³ This was followed by the system of British colonial and racial capitalism (1795–1890) and a related system of British colonial and mineral capitalism (1890–1948).⁴ Unfree labour patterns were intensified when the Afrikaner-oriented National Party won the general election of 1948, and although they “did not drastically transform the economic system of racial capitalism institutionalised by the English establishment, it used its political and ideological power to institutionalise a new version of it”.⁵ “Since 1990”, continues Terreblanche, “we have experienced a transition from the

1 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture by President Thabo Mbeki: University of Witwatersrand*, 29 July 2006 (2006 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/mbeko729.htm>.

2 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002).

3 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 14.

4 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 15.

5 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 15.

politico-economic system of white political domination and racial capitalism to a new system of democratic capitalism".⁶ South Africa's economic system has moved, Terreblanche argues, "over the past 30 years from one of colonial and racial capitalism to a neo-liberal, first-world, capitalist enclave that is disengaging itself from a large part of the black labour force".⁷ This transformation, though it has "coincided with the introduction of a system of representative democracy which is effectively controlled by a black, predominantly African, elite", still exhibits "an ominous systemic character".⁸

In the new politico-economic system, individual members of the upper classes (comprising one third of the population) profit handsomely from mainstream economic activity, while the mainly black lumpenproletariat (comprising 50 per cent of the population) is increasingly pauperised. Ironically, individual members of the black and white upper class in the new system seem as unconcerned about its dysfunctionality as individual members of the white elite were about that of the old. The common denominator between the old and the new systems is that part of society was/is systemically and undeservedly enriched, while the majority of the population were/are systemically and undeservedly impoverished—in the old system through *systemic exploitation*, and in the new system through *systemic neglect*.⁹

If, as Margaret Legum has argued, "It doesn't have to be like this!",¹⁰ the title of her book on alternatives to the Washington Consensus, how then has South Africa's socialist-leaning liberation struggle brought us to this socio-economic state? Strangely, the Bible has had something to do with this shift.

The long association of nineteenth century mission and colonialism with capitalism is well documented. While the primary objective of the missionaries who came to Southern Africa from the late 1700s was to awaken the dormant intellect of the African through the direct power of 'the Word',¹¹ Africans

6 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 15.

7 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 422. Figures released in May of 2016 indicate a South African unemployment rate of 26.7 percent; http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=6622

8 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 422–423.

9 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 423.

10 Legum, *It Doesn't Have to Be Like This! A New Economy for South Africa and the World* (Kenilworth: Ampersand Press, 2002).

11 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.; vol. One; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 230.

were always more interested in the other items the missionaries brought with them, including items such as the gun, tobacco, and candles, but most of all access to the chain of trade the missionaries enabled between the interior and the emerging European Colony on the coast.¹² Given, as we have observed, only muted African interest in the Word, missionaries were forced “to take a more circuitous route via the laborious reform of habit”.¹³ In the words of the Rev John Philip, the London Missionary Society Superintendent at the Cape in the early 1800s,

The elevation of a people from a state of barbarism to a high pitch of civilization supposes a revolution in the habits of that people, which it requires much time, and the operation of many causes to effect. By the preaching of the gospel, individuals . . . may be suddenly elevated to a surprising height in the scale of improvement, and the influence of such a person, on a savage tribe, must be great; but those on whom the power of divine truth operates in a direct manner, bear but a small proportion to the numbers who are only the subjects of an indirect or reflected influence. . . . [The] mass of people . . . are but slightly affected with divine truth.¹⁴

Because of this conviction concerning the need to revolutionize the habits of Africans, missionaries were particular about performing “the mundane signs and practices of European modernity”, accompanied by preaching and praying, conversation and exhortation, in the firm hope that the childlike Africans would not only learn by imitation (following Ephesians 5:1) but also benefit from the temporal benefits of civilisation.¹⁵ Hard work and the material benefits that it produced were central to the missionary vision; ‘commerce’ was an

12 West, “Early Encounters with the Bible among the Batlhaping: Historical and Hermeneutical Signs,” *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004).

13 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 230.

14 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 230, citing Philip, *Researches in South Africa; Illustrating the Civil, Moral, and Religious Condition of the Native Tribes: Including Journals of the Author's Travels in the Interior; Together with Detailed Accounts of the Progress of the Christian Missions, Exhibiting the Influence of Christianity in Promoting Civilization* (2 vols.; vol. 1; London: James Duncan, 1828), 2, 355.

15 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.; vol. Two; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 120. For a somewhat different account of relationships between Africa, colonialism, and modernity, see Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

alternative and antidote to both slavery and primitive African communism,¹⁶ and the Nonconformist missionaries we have met were determined to save the African from both.

The missionaries took it for granted that, “tied together by the mechanism of the market, they were indissolubly bound up in the workings of advanced capitalist economy and society,”¹⁷ and so for Africans to gain entry into the Christian commonwealth, they must be inducted into God’s economic order. The entry into the sacred economic order was via a transformation of African agriculture. The missionary John Campbell, on his second (1818) journey to the missions in South Africa on behalf of the London Missionary Society, argued that, “Till the present system [of agrarian production] shall undergo a complete revolution, such a population can never abound in grain, nor can it become an article of trade.”¹⁸ The missionary emphasis on a revolution in African agriculture “owed much to the close ties, both sociological and imaginative, that bound the missionaries to the displaced peasantry at home”. “But, even more fundamentally”, argue John and Jean Comaroff, “the Christians were from a world in which cultivation and salvation were explicitly linked—and joined together, more often than not, in a tangled mesh of horticultural imagery, much of it biblical in origin.”¹⁹

In their effort to transform African agriculture, the missionaries “spoke of reclaiming the prodigal soul along with the wasted garden”. As the Comaroffs go on to argue, “[t]he idiom of improvidence was neither accidental nor incidental. Saving the savage meant teaching the savage to save.”²⁰ Africans must be taught to turn away from their inefficient mode of production so that, using God’s talents, they might bring forth the greatest possible abundance. “Only then would black communities be animated by the spirit of commerce that—along with the Gospel of Christ—promoted exchange on a worldwide scale. Only then might they be part of the sacred economy of civilized society.”²¹ For the missionary the political economy was a form of ‘secular theology,’²² and so

16 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 79–80.

17 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 120.

18 Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in That Interior of That Country* (Two vols.; vol. 11; London: Francis Westley, 1822), 60. Van Riebeeck and his Company at the Cape in the mid-1600s would have shared a similar perspective with regard to African cattle.

19 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 121.

20 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 166.

21 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 166.

22 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 167.

the missionaries set out to establish economic reform with religious zeal, persuading with word and deed the Africans “to accept the currency of salvation, a task involving the introduction, along with the gospel, of market exchange, wage work, sometimes even a specially minted coinage”.²³

This transformation of the African economy did not always proceed as planned, nor did it always match the imagination of the missionaries, but over the course of the nineteenth century, Southern Africans were “drawn into the net cast by the commodity *form*: all came to partake of relations and transactions involving money and manufactures, whether as wage earners, as consumers, as the sellers of produce, as taxpayers”.²⁴ And the Bible, as we have witnessed, played a part in this alteration, as the font of both the missionary message and the missionary model of civilised habit (or so they claimed).

The RDP Bible: The Bible Re-enters the Public Realm

How ironically fitting then that after more than a century and a half of racial capitalism, the first macro-economic policy of a liberated South Africa, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), should be declared to have an “almost biblical character” by the then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki.²⁵

The RDP originally emanated from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and particularly its most powerful affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), and was envisaged as “a set of socio-economic benchmarks against which the performance of a new democratically elected government would be judged”.²⁶ Driven by COSATU, many members of the democratic movement made contributions, including the African National Congress, though the bulk of the work was done by members of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).²⁷

The RDP stated that “the democratic government must play a leading and enabling role in guiding the economy and the market towards reconstruction

23 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 168.

24 Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 216.

25 Mbeki, *A National Strategic Vision for South Africa: Address by Deputy President T.M. Mbeki, at the Development Planning Summit, Hosted by the Intergovernmental Forum, 27 November 1995* (1995 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1995/mbeki127.htm>.

26 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 108.

27 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 108.

and development”,²⁸ and warned that policies concentrating primarily on promoting economic growth “would accentuate existing inequalities, perpetuate mass poverty, and soon stifle economic growth”.²⁹ Thus the government was tasked with actively integrating economic growth with economic reconstruction and social development, being ever mindful of the distortions and injustices that had become endemic during racial capitalism and white political domination.³⁰

Swept to power in the 1994 election, with the RDP as its election manifesto, the ANC and its national President Nelson Mandela declared the RDP to be “the cornerstone on which the . . . GNU (Government of National Unity) is based”, and “the centerpiece of its socio-economic policy”.³¹ As Sampie Terreblanche argues, “Its symbolic importance and consensus it created cannot be over-emphasised, because it formed an important part of the nation-building and healing process after centuries of deep divisions and conflict”.³² The RDP provided a “bold new social democratic vision”, based on a state which would take the lead in promoting major structural adjustment toward a high-wage, high-productivity economy, while at the same time providing “basic welfare rights”, including “the right to basic needs such as shelter, food, health care, work opportunities, income security and all those aspects that promote the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of all people in our country, with special provision made for those who are unable to provide for themselves because of special problems”.³³

Driven, to a considerable degree, by the trade unions and civic organisations, the RDP emphasised that central to the new government’s planning process must be “both the meeting of the populace’s basic needs and the active empowerment of that populace in driving its own development process”.³⁴ In macro-economic terms the RDP put forward non-market mechanisms for the provision of basic goods and services, advocated a process of decommodification by turning exchange-values back into use-values, and set about democratising access to economic resources.³⁵ And even though its central chapters

28 Cited in Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 108.

29 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 108.

30 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 108–109.

31 Cited in Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 109.

32 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 109.

33 Cited in Seekings and Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), 347.

34 Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 206.

35 Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 456–457.

were compromised “in the direction of free-market premises”,³⁶ the RDP was hailed by left intellectuals as posing “challenges to the commanding heights of capitalism, racism and patriarchy”, by proposing “structural reforms” which would start the building of socialism under capitalism and lead inexorably to a socialist transition.³⁷ Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the RDP was, wrote John Saul, “less what it is, than what it might become” in the context of further class struggles.³⁸

What then did Thabo Mbeki mean when he said in 1995 that the RDP had an “almost biblical character”? Mbeki acknowledges that the RDP had “established a unique national consensus on the need for prosperity, democracy, human development and the removal of poverty”. “However”, he goes on to say, “despite its almost biblical character, the RDP Base Document did not provide us with all the answers”. This is because, he continues, “We have always known that its many many priorities and programmes need to be distilled into a series of realistic steps, guided by a long term vision and our resource constraints”.³⁹ What Mbeki seems to be saying here is that though the RDP, like the Bible, offers a commendable prophetic vision, the vision of the RDP, like that of the Bible, is not really realistic.

Within two years of its adoption, the RDP was replaced, with almost no consultation—and consultation had been the hallmark of Alliance liberation politics up to this point—by a new, pro-capitalist, macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution). Indeed, writes Martin Legassik, though the name of the RDP continued to be invoked by the ANC up to the 1999 election campaign and even later, “the economic leadership of the ANC had from the start no intention of implementing the RDP where it clashed with their pro-business aims of export-orientation, trade liberalisation, fiscal austerity or privatisation”.⁴⁰ Marching to power under the flag of the RDP, the ANC government began, within days, to dismantle the RDP’s African socialist potential.⁴¹ The ‘objective’ political factors which led to this include the following two factors, according to the analysis of the South African Communist Party (SACP): a negotiated transition to democracy in the late-1980s and early-1990s which brought together the apartheid regime, unable

36 Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle*, 206.

37 Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 457.

38 Saul, *The Next Liberation Struggle*, 206–207.

39 Mbeki, *A National Strategic Vision for South Africa: Address by Deputy President T.M. Mbeki, at the Development Planning Summit, Hosted by the Intergovernmental Forum, 27 November 1995*, 1.

40 Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 457.

41 Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 458.

any longer to rule, and the ANC-led alliance, yet to decisively defeat the apartheid state; and the emergence of a “bonapartist state” in which “the bourgeois class had already lost, and the working class not yet gained the ability to govern the nation”, resolved, if only temporarily, by a form of state in which a great heroic personality stands above the contending forces.⁴² The iconic status of Nelson Mandela and the power of the office of the presidency were used by the ANC to enforce ‘acceptance’ of GEAR, even though Mandela later regretted the way in which it was done,⁴³ for there had been no discussion of the shift away from the RDP even within the ANC National Executive Committee, nor had there been any consultation with the Tripartite Alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP.⁴⁴

In the analysis of the SACP, “the GEAR process needs essentially to be understood as the first decisive step in the launching of a new state/presidential project under the effective direction not of Mandela, but of his successor, then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki”.⁴⁵ This does not mean, the SACP goes on to acknowledge, that there were not ‘objective’ economic factors that shaped the character and evolution of the post-Mandela presidency and its adoption of GEAR.⁴⁶ However, to argue that there is a certain ‘objectivity’ about the South African presidency and its macro-economic policy is not to argue, says the SACP, that their particular trajectories were or are inevitable. Clearly global and national realities impose real constraints, which the South African left need to appreciate, but “national realities would have allowed (and still do allow) different, much more transformative outcomes”.⁴⁷

While the SACP is correct in stating that “the key features of the 1996 [GEAR] class project are not merely the result of a particular person with particular subjective traits”,⁴⁸ Thabo Mbeki is responsible for using the Bible to legitimate the move from the RDP to GEAR. It is important to note, however, that RDP discourse did not disappear with the embrace of GEAR. While the ANC had already shut down the RDP in March 1996, the ANC nevertheless used it as their election manifesto in 1999, declaring that the RDP “was the only relevant detailed programme to carry South Africa to freedom and social justice”.⁴⁹ By

42 SACP, “Special Edition,” *Bua Komanisi!: Information Bulletin of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party* (2006): 19–21.

43 SACP, “Special Edition,” 21.

44 Legassik, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 458.

45 SACP, “Special Edition,” 21.

46 SACP, “Special Edition,” 22.

47 SACP, “Special Edition,” 22.

48 SACP, “Special Edition,” 22. But see also Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007).

49 Cited in Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 112.

sustaining the rhetoric of the RDP, with its people-centred and utopian project, but abandoning its socialist macro-economic policies, the ANC “started to put into the heads of ordinary South Africans”, Legassick argues, “the idea of ‘empty promises’, which resounded so loudly in the delivery protests of 2004 onwards”.⁵⁰

This shift from “racial to class apartheid”, to use Patrick Bond’s characterisation,⁵¹ and the economic logic behind South Africa’s thousands of ‘service-delivery protests’⁵² have a longer gestation. Hein Marais argues that the shift from the RDP to GEAR, though politically and economically substantive, is part of “a longer narrative” that dates back beyond Mbeki to “the halting efforts of the apartheid regime in the early 1980s”.⁵³ Picking up on Marais’ analysis, Gillian Hart agrees that overstating the shift from the RDP to GEAR “downplays the extent to which alliances between corporate capital and a powerful faction of the ANC had sidelined alternatives such as the Macro-Economic Research Group report in the early 1990s . . .”,⁵⁴ while also guaranteeing the ongoing dominance of a system of capital accumulation centered on the MEC [minerals-energy complex] and its repositioning in relation to the global economy”.⁵⁵ Turning to her key analytical categories, Hart goes on to argue, “In addition, it is important to attend to the relations between these de-nationalising forces and processes of re-nationalisation. Far from just a shift from neo-Keynesianism to neoliberalism, both the RDP and GEAR entailed redefinitions of the NDR [National Democratic Revolution] that took shape in relation to forces unleashed by de-nationalising processes”.⁵⁶

Hart recognises the role of elites, whether the elites of white capital or ANC elites, but argues that “[r]ather than *just* an elite pact—although it was in part that—the transition [from apartheid] is more usefully understood in terms of

50 Legassick, *Towards Socialist Democracy*, 457. See also Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013), 155–156. There are also echoes of this sense of socio-economic betrayal in the waves of xenophobic violence that have wracked South Africa.

51 Bond, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), 253–308.

52 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 3, 47–50.

53 Marais, *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 137.

54 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 181–182. See also Fine and Padayachee, “A Sustainable Growth Path?,” in *South African Review* (ed. Friedman; Pretoria: HSRC, 2000).

55 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 181–182.

56 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 182.

simultaneous processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation that have been playing out in relation to one another in increasingly conflictual ways”.⁵⁷

Instead of focusing primarily on the ANC’s adoption of conservative neoliberal macro-economic policies in 1996, I am using the term de-nationalisation to encompass the terms on which heavily concentrated corporate capital re-engaged with the increasingly financialised global economy starting in the early 1990s, and the ways in which these forces are driving increasing inequality and the generation of surplus populations. While successive ANC administrations have moved in more interventionist directions since the early 2000s and now declare themselves strongly anti-neoliberal and passionately pro-poor, the ravages wrought by processes of de-nationalisation continue apace.⁵⁸

“Re-nationalisation”, Hart goes on to argue, turning to de-nationalisation’s companion process, “engages . . . crucial questions about how the post-apartheid ‘nation’ came to be produced, as well as the ongoing importance of articulations of the ‘nation’ to the ANC’s hegemonic project”.⁵⁹ ‘The national question’, Hart acknowledges, was “a profoundly evocative term that for many South Africans conjures up struggles against colonialism and imperialism, the indignities and violence of racial injustice and dispossession, the sacrifices and suffering embodied in movements for national liberation, and the visions of social and economic justice for which many fought and died”.⁶⁰ Emblematic of processes of re-nationalisation, of re-forming ‘the (new) nation’ after apartheid, was the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), “a key phrase of the ANC Alliance” and “the meanings and ownership of which . . . have become an increasingly contentious site of struggle within the ANC Alliance over the decade of the 2000s”,⁶¹ and beyond.

Having introduced her two key analytical terms, Hart goes on to offer a detailed analysis. In analysing the distinctive South African dimensions of denationalisation, Hart begins by arguing that instead of debating whether or not South Africa is ‘neoliberal’—recognising as she does that even the Mbeki administration and then more emphatically the ANC administrations that followed under Kgalema Motlanthe and Jacob Zuma gradually increased government spending on social welfare and a series of ‘developmental state’ initiatives

57 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 156.

58 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 156.

59 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 156–157.

60 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 157.

61 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 157.

after 20004, as part of a strategy of the containment of popular discontent⁶²—it is more useful “to focus on the historically specific forms and dynamics of capital accumulation in relation to changing global political-economic forces”.⁶³ The economic crisis post-liberation South Africa finds itself facing can be understood, Hart argues along with a range of other scholars, as “a crisis of profitability” related directly to the minerals-energy complex and going back before the social upheavals of the 1970s.⁶⁴ The ‘minerals-energy complex’, a term used by Ben Fine and Zavareh Rustomjee,⁶⁵ refers to the cluster of heavy industries associated with mining and energy that have dominated the South African economy since the mineral discoveries of the late 1800s,⁶⁶ some (mainly diamonds) in the vicinity of Robert Moffat’s mission. These ‘discoveries’ placed yet more pressure on the land and peoples of the interior, providing the impetus for their incorporation into the Colony. The minerals-energy complex, argues Hart, “continues to play a central role in shaping the course of capitalist accumulation in South Africa in and through relations between capital and the state”, providing “a bridge between the abstract tendencies of the capitalist mode of production and . . . how the political economy of capitalism is put together [in specific times and places] and the critical role played by the state in the process”.⁶⁷

The quest for sustained profitability in the sector of the minerals-energy complex led to clandestine meetings in the early 1990s coordinated by the white corporate leaders of South Africa’s mining houses with select ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, in order to secure an economic system that would serve both white elites and ANC elites. It is within this context that Hart uses the term ‘de-nationalisation’ “to encompass an array of moves by South African conglomerates intent on reconnecting with the increasingly financialised global economy, from which they were partially excluded during the 1980s”,⁶⁸ through the internal constraints of the apartheid system and the external constraints of international economic sanctions. Key concerns were

62 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 158. Though this could be considered as ‘tinkering’ with a neo-liberal marco-economic system.

63 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 159.

64 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 159.

65 Fine and Rustomjee, *The Political Economy of South Africa: From Minerals-Energy Complex to Industrialisation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

66 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 159.

67 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 159–160, citing in the second quotation Ashman, et al., “The Crisis in South Africa: Neoliberalism, Financialization and Uneven and Combined Development,” in *Socialist Register 2011: The Crisis This Time* (eds. Panitch, et al.; London: Merlin Press, 2010), 180.

68 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 161–162.

maintaining white property ownership within South Africa and moving white capital out of South Africa. Central to de-nationalisation was disinvestment in the South African economy though the liberalisation of exchange controls and macro-economic permission for South African controlled multinationals “to move their primary listings to London in the 1990s on the grounds that it would allow South African firms to raise capital more cheaply in international markets and encourage inward foreign direct investment”.⁶⁹

The “massive and escalating capital flight” enabled by both the RDP and GEAR amounted to “more than double the already low level of domestic investment”,⁷⁰ resulting in a lack of government financial capacity to actually undertake and implement ‘reconstruction and development’. Even the government’s Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) project participated in this dimension of de-nationalisation, “through public-private partnerships with foreign capital and government at different levels”.⁷¹ So “[e]ven before the global economic crisis hit in late 2008, the combined result of these [de-nationalising] forces was a jobless form of growth and the persistence of mass poverty for the majority of the black population, alongside increasing—albeit partially de-racialised—concentrations of wealth”.⁷² Because levels of investment within the domestic economy are limited by de-nationalisation, at the very time that the ANC led government is expected ‘to deliver’ what it has promised through the RDP and GEAR (with the latter still being represented in RDP rhetoric), there is a lack of government capacity to do so, leading to the ‘service-delivery protests’ that characterise contemporary South Africa,⁷³ as ANC Alliance supporters call their leaders to account by taking to the streets.

One other dimension of de-nationalisation that Hart draws our attention to is “the absence, by and large, of white corporate capital from the power bloc”,⁷⁴ leading to a situation “where the iniquities of apartheid . . . [had] been overthrown and the masters of society were black, but the rule of capital and its miseries was as implacable as ever”,⁷⁵ and where “the apparent consent of white corporate capital to leadership by the black majority represents a bourgeois project of a special type”.⁷⁶

69 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 162.

70 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 164.

71 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 164.

72 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 164.

73 See the carefully analysed example in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 95–154.

74 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 165.

75 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 165, citing Anderson, “Lula’s Brazil,” *London Review of Books* 33, no. 7 (2011).

76 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 165.

Through practices and processes of de-nationalisation, white South African corporate capital has on one level succeeded spectacularly in securing the conditions for accumulation. Yet, at the same time, these very same practices and processes have systematically eroded livelihoods and fed into undermining the capacity of the ANC to fulfill its role of securing the consent of those whom it governs.⁷⁷

In summarising her analysis, Hart makes it clear that “de-nationalisation does not refer to political intervention in the ‘economy’ conceived as a separate sphere. It signals instead the simultaneously economic, political and cultural practices and processes that are generating ongoing inequality and ‘surplus’ populations, and the conflicts that surround them”.⁷⁸ “De-nationalisation focuses attention on the historical and geographical specificities of southern African racial capitalism and settler colonialism”, together with “their interconnections with forces at play in other parts of the world, and their modes of reconnecting with the increasingly financialised global political economy in the post-apartheid period”.⁷⁹ Processes of de-nationalisation, Hart argues, “continue to shape the present—but can only be understood in relation to, and deeply entangled with, practices and processes of re-nationalisation”.⁸⁰

Hart then turns to these related processes of re-nationalisation. As far back as 1988, Joe Slovo, then general secretary of the banned SACP, rejected “pressures from the Soviet Academy of Sciences for a multinational solution to the issue of minority rights in a post-apartheid order—a position that echoed strongly with pressures from the liberal right for a consociational form of government along these lines”.⁸¹ As Hart notes, Slovo’s argument was unequivocal:

Despite the existence of cultural and racial diversity, South Africa is not a multi-national country. It is a nation in the making; a process which is increasingly being advanced in struggle and one which can only be finally completed after the racist tyranny is defeated. The concept of one united nation, embracing all our ethnic communities, remains the virtually undisputed liberation objective.⁸²

77 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 165.

78 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 7.

79 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 7.

80 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 7.

81 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 166.

82 Cited in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 166, with the entire quotation emphasised by Slovo.

“Along with his insistence on national unity as a key weapon in the battle against racist tyranny, Slovo underscored”, argues Hart, “its centrality to the doctrine of the NDR [National Democratic Revolution], and the vanguard role of the working class in the march towards socialism.”⁸³

The winning of the objectives of the national democratic revolution will, in turn, lay the basis for a steady advance in the direction of deepening our national unity on all fronts—economic, political and cultural—and towards a socialist transformation. For our working class nation-building means, among other things, unifying themselves nationally as the leading class whose developing culture, aspirations and economic interests become increasingly those of the overwhelming majority of our people.⁸⁴

Along with two other dimensions of re-nationalisation, “Slovo’s insistence on the NDR as central to the reconstitution of the South African nation has remained a consistent theme of the post-apartheid order, at the same time that the meanings and ownership of the NDR have become a veritable battleground within the ANC Alliance, especially since the late 1990s”.⁸⁵ The battle is fought on the terrain of economics, and is shaped by the notion, originating within the SACP in the early 1960s, that the South African nation-state is characterised by ‘colonialism of a special type’.⁸⁶ The variant form of colonialism, colonialism of a special type, that constitutes South Africa includes the following elements: “a relatively extensive European settler occupation of the territory; the survival of indigenous African people and their societies as an oppressed by overwhelming majority; and the *decisive* factor—the imperialist implantation of a highly developed ‘mature’ capitalist system into this colonial setting”.⁸⁷

Given this analysis, one trajectory within the ANC Alliance emphasises a two-stage revolution, with the NDR as a strategic first stage, requiring “the building of a national democratic state within the framework of the Freedom Charter of 1955”, which will “lay the indispensable basis for the advance of our country along non-capitalist lines to a communist and socialist future”.⁸⁸ Critics

83 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 166.

84 Cited in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 167, and again the entire quotation is emphasised by Slovo.

85 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 167.

86 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 175.

87 SACP, “The South African Road to Socialism: 13th Congress Political Programme of the SACP 2012–2017: SACP’s 5 Year Plan,” (2012), 5.

88 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 176, citing in the second quotation the original SACP document “The Road to South African Freedom”; for a more recent articulation see

of this two-stage revolution argue, as does Ruth First, that “[t]he national and the class struggle are not part of some natural order of succession, but take place coterminously. This is because workers are exploited as workers and also as members of a nationally oppressed group, and not even their national demands can be met without the destruction of the capitalist order”.⁸⁹ Devan Pillay is even more blunt, arguing that the NDR is a form of deception, legitimating a particular economic project, as “[i]t glues together disparate social classes under the hegemony of conservative class interests—a coalition of white and emerging comprador black capital (enmeshed in ever-expanding networks of patronage and corruption), and a professional black middle-class that has done rather well out of the post-apartheid dispensation”.⁹⁰

Hart’s analysis makes it clear why the NDR is a key site of struggle within the processes of nation-building or re-nationalisation in South Africa. In summarising her argument she insists that “this aspect of re-nationalisation highlights that it is not a separable ‘political’ process, but is crucially about making the case for accommodation of the inequalities of post-apartheid capitalism as a transitory phenomenon, to be superseded by the (ever-retreating) second phase”.⁹¹ “Forged in the context of fierce debates over race, class and nationalism since the first part of the twentieth century; elaborated during the anti-apartheid struggle; and reworked in the context of the transition”, the discourse of ‘colonialism of a special type’ and ‘the national democratic revolution’ “carry deep popular resonance”,⁹² argues Hart. Indeed, both South African Black Theology and South African Contextual Theology have recast this political and economic discourse in theological terms. While Takatso Mofokeng may have been pessimistic about Marxism replacing the Bible in the Black struggle, being “far ahead of many blacks, especially adult people”,⁹³ Marxist and socialist categories and concepts were a significant component of the biblical interpretation and theology of both Black Theology and Contextual Theology.⁹⁴

SACP, “The South African Road to Socialism: 13th Congress Political Programme of the SACP 2012–2017: SACP’s 5 Year Plan,” 6.

89 Cited in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 178.

90 Cited in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 178.

91 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 8.

92 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 8.

93 Mofokeng, “Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation,” *Journal of Black Theology* 2 (1988): 40.

94 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988); Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988); West, “Africa’s Liberation Theologies: An Historical-Hermeneutical Analysis,” in *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred*

Religious discourse also infuses Hart's second dimension of re-nationalisation. Drawing on the work of Ari Sitas,⁹⁵ Hart argues that the transition from apartheid "required discursive shifts—a process of scripting the 'nation' through what Sitas calls 'conflicting and competing narratives of commonality and indigenerality'".⁹⁶ Key to his scripting were the quasi-religious, "inclusive discourses of the 'rainbow nation' associated with Nelson Mandela", which Sitas characterises as 'indigenerality'—"the liberal, ecclesiastical discourse of forgiveness that made possible the negotiations to end apartheid, and found further expression in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]".⁹⁷ Like the 'national question', "discourses of inclusion", Hart argues, "were not just imposed from above", but had "popular appeal",⁹⁸ with the religious terrain being presided over by the enigmatic prophet Desmond Tutu, the high-priest of the "rainbow people of God".⁹⁹

Established in 1995 by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, the TRC "was not just about 'truth-telling' by perpetrators of human rights abuses; it was also about establishing relations of national identity",¹⁰⁰ as Ivor Chipkin argues, referring to Desmond Tutu's observation that "we were a useful paradigm for our nation, for if we could eventually be welded into a reasonably coherent, united and reconciled group then there would be hope for South Africa".¹⁰¹ However, as Hart argues, for Sitas "the limits of Mandela's non-racialism and reasons for the failure of rainbowism as a narrative for nation-building and unity, went far beyond the discursive impossibility of the TRC",¹⁰² for Sitas argues that the TRC's "failure can be attributed to white intransigence and to whites' self-serving indifference to the 'new' South Africa".¹⁰³ And Neville Alexander points to the political and economic compromises with which the TRC was complicit, failing as it did to "undertake any

Places, Identities, Practices and Politics (ed. Brunn; Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer, 2015).

- 95 Sitas, *The Mandela Decade 1990–2000: Labour, Culture and Society in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010).
- 96 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 168.
- 97 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 7.
- 98 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 7.
- 99 Tutu and Allen eds, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). See the discussion in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 169–171.
- 100 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 169, who goes on to cite Chipkin.
- 101 Cited in Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'the People'* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 183.
- 102 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 170.
- 103 Sitas, *The Mandela Decade*, 22.

in-depth analysis of the system of apartheid and especially not of the role of big business in sustaining, if not actually initiating, that system".¹⁰⁴ In addition, from a religious perspective, the TRC adopted notions of 'reconciliation' contested by South African Black Theology,¹⁰⁵ and embodied rituals of reconciliation and forgiveness that were religiously aligned to particular forms of Christianity, resulting in a lack of recognition and identification from South Africa's other religions.¹⁰⁶

The third dimension of re-nationalisation that Hart discusses are "the ANC government's immigration policies and practices".¹⁰⁷ Having used apartheid legislation until 2002, when the Aliens Control Act was eventually repealed, "the bounding of the nation" remains a feature of "fortress South Africa", argues Hart, through immigration policy, regular police raids to 'clean-up' areas occupied by 'foreigners', popular ethnicity-based vigilantism, and opportunist ethnicity-based crime.¹⁰⁸ A key component of her argument, drawing on the work of Michael Neocosmos,¹⁰⁹ is that, citing Neocosmos, "Xenophobia and authoritarianism of which it is but an example, are a product of liberalism, liberal democracy, and Human Rights Discourse. . . . and can only coherently be understood as a result of a form of politics where the state is seen as the sole definer of citizenship".¹¹⁰ Summarising Neocosmos' argument, Hart states that, "At the core of this argument is the claim that 'state politics has systematically de-politicised the people with emphasis being exclusively placed on managerialism (to deliver "human rights"), juridical expertise (to protect "human rights") and education (to alter xenophobic attitudes)'—in other words, that 'technicism has replaced politics'".¹¹¹

Deflecting the discourse of xenophobia, Thabo Mbeki used notions related to 'the African renaissance' to re-nationalise South Africans during his tenure

104 Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 128, cited in Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 171.

105 Mosala, "The Meaning of Reconciliation: A Black Perspective," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 59 (1987).

106 Radikobo Ntsimane, a colleague, made this argument during the TRC process.

107 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 8.

108 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 8. "Operation Fiela", which can be translated as 'operation to sweep away' is the most recent example, launched in May 2015.

109 Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 2010).

110 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 173, citing Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners'*, 115.

111 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 173, citing Neocosmos, *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners'*, 115.

as Deputy President. On the 8th May 1996, as South Africa shifted from the RDP to GEAR, Mbeki gave his “I Am an African” speech, at the adoption of the “The Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill” in Cape Town.¹¹² In this speech he interpellated, called forth and summoned, each and every South African as an African, embodying within his own ‘Africanness’ the African identity of all South Africans, re-nationalising us all as Africans. And while the emphasis in this speech is on re-nationalisation, Mbeki is adept at introducing elements that de-nationalise and reconnect South Africans to the African continent as a whole, though not here in the economic sense emphasised by Hart. Three years later, on the 9th April 1998, Mbeki engaged in a closely related form of de-nationalisation in a speech to the United Nations entitled “The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World”.¹¹³ The emphasis in this speech is on de-nationalisation, firmly fixing South Africa within the African continent, but there are elements of re-nationalisation here as well, for example when he tells his audience:

In our own country, conscious of the need to properly handle the contradictions and conflicts that might arise among different ethnic and national groups, aware also of the fact that such conflicts have been an important element of instability on the continent, we have made it a constitutional requirement to establish a Commission for the Promotion of Cultural, Language and Religious Rights.¹¹⁴

Though Mbeki does not explicitly include religion as a driver of African “contradictions and conflicts”, his cautious engagement with religion in general and Christianity in particular were a recognisable feature of his early public persona in South Africa. So it is quite remarkable to find Mbeki publically devoting so much of the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture (29th July 2006) to the Bible. In a similar way to which he used the notion of ‘African’ to engage in the discourses of both de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation, Mbeki was to use the Bible, but now with the economic focus that is found in Hart’s analysis. So while we should not overstate Thabo Mbeki’s role in the shift from the RDP to GEAR, we should recognise his role in returning the Bible to the

112 Mbeki, *I Am an African* (African National Congress, 1996); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4322>.

113 Mbeki, *The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World* (1998); available from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1998/mbeko409.htm>.

114 Mbeki, *The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World*.

South African public political and economic realm, using the Bible to buttress neo-colonial forms of economic policy.

Mbeki's Bible: Separating the Moral and Economic Spheres

Thabo Mbeki has shown a rather ambiguous attitude to the Bible in his public speeches. His Mfengu (or Fingo) missionary-Christian education in the East Cape and his love for classic literature would have made Mbeki thoroughly familiar with the Bible. But his upbringing in the staunchly African Marxist home of Govan and Epainette Mbeki and his expulsion from his missionary-Christian school, Lovedale College, in his matric year for his active involvement in the African Students' Organisation would have made him deeply aware of the Bible's ambiguity. And yet an analysis of his public speeches during his tenure as Deputy President and President demonstrates a gradual shift in his attitude to the Bible and in his use of the Bible, with Mbeki using the Bible more extensively, more substantively, and with more of a focus on the economic.

The most marked use of the Bible by Mbeki was in the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture.¹¹⁵ What makes this occasion so significant is not only the substantial use he makes of the Bible but how he uses it to shift the focus of the RDP from a programme about economic transformation to a metaphor about moral renewal. So extensive is his use of the Bible in this lecture that he felt the need to point out in the oral presentation of the lecture (though it is not included in the published version) that his extensive reference to the Bible did not mean that he was "about to become a priest" (to which this audience responded with laughter).¹¹⁶ Embarrassed by his constant reference to the Bible before his immediate audience of the educated, somewhat liberal, elite, Mbeki nevertheless crafts a lecture deeply dependent on the Bible, mindful of the masses watching television or listening to the radio, for whom the Bible is a significant and sacred resource in their daily struggles. Indeed,

¹¹⁵ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

¹¹⁶ Mbeki, "The Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture: Transcript of President Thabo Mbeki's Lecture, 29 July 2006," (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2006). Jeremy Punt notes that "There is little surprise about South African political leaders' use of the bible in the establishment and maintenance of Apartheid during the latter part of the first half of twentieth century, and their references to biblical texts in the attempt to justify racial segregation. The Bible's continuing influence in post-Apartheid South Africa is, however, a big surprise!"; Punt, "Biblical Hermeneutics, Actualisation and Marginality in the New South Africa," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. De Wit and West; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 389.

the very use of the Bible in this speech is a form of re-nationalisation, as Mbeki joins the millions of South Africans for whom the Bible is sacred. But how he uses the Bible is a form of de-nationalisation, as Mbeki uses the Bible to legitimate the shift from the RDP to GEAR.

But before we focus on this particular speech in some depth, it is useful to locate Mbeki's use of the Bible within the longer trajectory of his apprehension of the Bible. Belatedly, Mbeki came to recognise, like Mofokeng, that the Bible remains a significant text in the South African context. In his earlier appropriations of the Bible, Mbeki had tended to dispute its contribution. In an address to the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors in 2001,¹¹⁷ Mbeki begins by tackling "those who are sceptical of our capacity as Africans to overcome our problems of many centuries". "In other words", he says a little later, "Africa and Africans are forever condemned to be the hopeless continent and people". He then immediately cites "the offensive biblical discussion about the children of Ham, Shem and Japhet" in Genesis 9:24–26, which he goes on to cite in full, before going on to link this biblical text with another, Joshua 9:23. In both cases he uses the King James Version of the Bible. Mbeki introduces the two biblical references as follows:

In the Book of Genesis, Chapter 9, Verses 24 to 26, it is written:

And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

And he said, cursed be Canaan. A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.

And then in Joshua, Chapter 9, Verse 23, the Bible says:

Now therefore, ye are accursed and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Mbeki, *Address by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, at the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors, Sandton, 16 August 2001* (2001 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/2001/tm2001/tm08i60i.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Mbeki, *Address by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, at the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors, Sandton, 16 August 2001*, 2.

Mbeki then addresses his audience directly, saying “Of course you know that Canaan was a son of Ham”,¹¹⁹ alluding to the long history of interpretation, participated in by the Dutch East India Company at the Cape, of Ham as the ancestor of the Black people who were cursed and so predestined by God to be “bondmen and hewers of wood and drawers of water”.¹²⁰ The context of Mbeki’s invocation of Ham are the comments he makes at the beginning of speech, where he welcomes the governors to South Africa and then says:

Perhaps unnecessarily, I would urge you to be as critical as necessary about our common African experience, to contribute to the success of the struggle for the historic renewal of our continent. In this context, I trust that you will reflect frankly on the experience of African central banks in terms of their relations with our governments. That experience relates directly to the issue of the successes and failures of central banks on our continent and the contingent successes and failures of economic policy in our countries.

In this context, it should no longer be the case that African gatherings such as this are distinguished by the passion with which they lament African failures and pre-occupy themselves with agendas set by others. I am certain that like many of us, you are haunted by the cover page of an eminent financial magazine which, not so long ago, carried the words—‘Africa: the hopeless continent.’ Undoubtedly, you know this as well as I do that there are many, both on our continent and elsewhere in the world, who wait to celebrate the failure of the two critically important initiatives our continent has taken recently. These are the African Union, the AU, and the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme, MAP, more recently described as the New African Initiative.

I am told that responding to the hope evoked by the AU and MAP, those who are skeptical of our capacity as Africans to overcome our problems of many centuries, are already busy at work preparing their triumphant treatises that will be published and loudly trumpeted ‘when the bubble bursts’. The boldest among these souls have already argued the point that there cannot be an African Renaissance because there was never an

119 Mbeki, *Address by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, at the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors, Sandton, 16 August 2001*, 2.

120 Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007), 25–42.

African Naissance. They say that there cannot be a rebirth because there was never a birth. In other words, Africa and Africans are forever condemned to be the hopeless continent and people.

In this context, some will regress to the offensive biblical discussion about the children of Ham, Shem and Japhet.¹²¹

Having cited the biblical texts, Mbeki goes on to say: “I raise these questions because, as I have said, there are some who are convinced that ours is cursed to remain permanently a hopeless continent. I mention them also because I assume that before you became central bank governors, you were Africans, whom some claim to be descendants of Ham. I also assume that despite the fact that you are central bank governors, you remain, still, African”.¹²² Clearly Mbeki is contesting the racist interpretations of these particular biblical texts that have shaped white Afrikaner receptions of these texts in South Africa, and in another lecture he makes similar arguments about other contexts “where the Bible is interpreted by those who have justified segregation”.¹²³ In both lectures Mbeki implies that the Bible lends itself to such interpretations, and in the case of the Ham references, Mbeki’s assumption seems to be that the Bible is indeed dealing with ‘race’. The Bible in his view is a problem because it advocates and even mandates Black subservience.

There may be a similar questioning of the Bible in and of itself in the 30th May 2003 edition of “ANC Today”, where in the opening article on “Our Country Needs Facts, Not Groundless Allegations”, Mbeki begins by referring to the Bible: “In the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew, it is said that Jesus Christ saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fishing in the Sea of Galilee. And he said to them: ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ [Matthew 4:19]”.¹²⁴

In the next line he goes on to engage this biblical text, saying:

¹²¹ Mbeki, *Address by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, at the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors, Sandton, 16 August 2001*, 1–2. The paragraphing is mine, as Mbeki tends to construct his speeches with a break between each sentence.

¹²² Mbeki, *Address by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, at the 25th Meeting of the Association of African Central Bank Governors, Sandton, 16 August 2001*, 2–3.

¹²³ Mbeki, *Address by President Thabo Mbeki, at the Inaugural Zk Matthews Memorial Lecture, University of Fort Hare, 12 October 2001* (2001 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/2001/tm2001/tm101201.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Mbeki, *Our Country Needs Facts, Not Groundless Allegations* (30 May–5 June 2003 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/docs/anc2003/at21.htm>.

Perhaps taking a cue from this, some in our country have appointed themselves as ‘fishers of corrupt men’. Our governance system is the sea in which they have chosen to exercise their craft. From everything they say, it is clear that they know it as a matter of fact that they are bound to return from their fishing expeditions with huge catches of corrupt men (and women).¹²⁵

The rest of this “Letter from the President” develops the theme, sustaining the ‘fishing’ metaphor throughout. The thrust of Mbeki’s article is clear. He is deeply distressed by those in our country that assume the government is corrupt simply because it is a predominantly (Black) African government. He rejects their “highly offensive and deeply entrenched stereotype of Africans” as they seek “to portray Africans as a people that are corrupt, given to telling lies, prone to theft and self-enrichment by immoral means, a people that are otherwise contemptible in the eyes of the ‘civilized’”.¹²⁶ The self-appointed task of these detractors, Mbeki seems to be saying, is to fish for corruption when there is none (or very little).

However, while Mbeki’s basic argument is clear, his use of Matthew 4:19 is somewhat obscure. He may be using the Matthew text to set up a contrast between the legitimate appointment by Jesus of disciples who will go out and do good to men and women—Mbeki is carefully inclusive in his language—and the illegitimate presumption of those who “have appointed themselves” to the task of rooting out imagined corruption. Both sets of people are on a mission, Mbeki may be saying, one legitimate and one not. But Mbeki may be using the Matthew text more negatively, implying by his use of this passage that just as religious people are easily taken in by religious propaganda, so too there are those South Africans who are easily taken in by anti-African stereotypes. Or, Mbeki may simply be using an image from the Bible that has become separated from and independent of its biblical literary context, in which case there may be little or no connection between Mbeki’s use of the image and Matthew’s. The topic of corruption recurs, as we will see, for Mbeki returns to it in his most extensive appropriations of the Bible, though quite differently.

Mbeki often uses the Bible instrumentally, invoking its aura rather than its substance. So, for example, he is fond of referring to the biblical statement that “those who have ears to hear, let them hear”. On one occasion this was to remind those gathered to celebrate the opening of the African National Congress (ANC) archives “about the authentic and real experiences of our own

¹²⁵ Mbeki, *Our Country Needs Facts, Not Groundless Allegations*, 1.

¹²⁶ Mbeki, *Our Country Needs Facts, Not Groundless Allegations*, 4.

people and their organisations, recorded in the ANC archive”.¹²⁷ On another occasion he invokes the same expression when he says, in the context of a speech at the opening of the NGO Forum of the World Conference Against Racism, “It may be that those who, for whatever reason, do not have eyes to see and ears to hear, to borrow a Biblical expression, believe that because racism and sexism are bereft of respectable advocates, they have ceased to exist as social constructs that determine the lives and the future of billions of people”.¹²⁸ There are many such uses of the Bible in Mbeki’s public discourse, with either direct references or allusions to the Bible.

Though not dealing with the Bible itself directly, Mbeki generated considerable outrage among Black South Africans when he criticised their choice of Biblical Studies as a University subject. Mbeki invoked the ire of many South Africans, when he stated quite unambiguously that those who come out of teacher training, “for instance, with Biblical Studies... are not going to get very many jobs for that”.¹²⁹ Vast numbers of South Africans, the vast majority Black South Africans, had done Biblical Studies at school as part of the 1953 Bantu Education Act (as part of the Christian National Education system of the apartheid era), many taking it as far as matric and then going on to take it as a university subject. So there was widespread outrage at Mbeki’s dismissal of this discipline of study. Mbeki was worried, it would seem, about not only the market value of this discipline, but also about the ideological baggage this discipline carried, coming as it did from a system in which large numbers of Black university students registered for Biblical Studies and in so doing cross-subsidised the few white Afrikaner students who registered for theological degrees within white Afrikaner church control theological faculties. Mbeki may well have been worried too about the very ‘nature’ of a book that could so easily be used towards such segregated ends.

However, as has already been intimated, there are also indications of a more substantive appropriation of the Bible by Mbeki. As early as 1995, while Mbeki was Deputy President, he said that the liberation government’s Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had “established a unique national

127 Mbeki, *Speech by Mr Tm Mbeki, Deputy President, at the Opening of the ANC Archives: University of Fort Hare, 17 March 1996* (1996 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/tm1996/sp960317.pdf>.

128 Mbeki, *Speech, at the Opening of the Ngo Forum of the World Conference against Racism* (2001 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/2001/tm2001/tmo82801.pdf>.

129 Mbeki, *Interview with President Thabo Mbeki on Sabc 2 on Sunday, by John Perlman and Redi Direko, 8 Febuary 2004* (2004 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?releid=1904>.

consensus on the need for prosperity, democracy, human development and the removal of poverty". "However", he goes on to say, "despite its almost biblical character, the RDP Base Document did not provide us with all the answers". This is because, he continues, "We have always known that its many many priorities and programmes need to be distilled into a series of realistic steps, guided by a long term vision and our resource constraints".¹³⁰ While Mbeki seems to view the "biblical character" of the RDP as a positive attribute, offering as it does a prophetic perspective, he makes it clear that both the Bible and the RDP offer visions that are not "realistic". While the Bible has the capacity to offer a prophetic vision of sorts, Mbeki is certain that it lacks the capacity to speak realistically about the economic realm.

This back-handed appropriation, both affirming and problematising the Bible, is a common feature of his use of the Bible. This is evident in an address at the launch of Business Arts South Africa (BASA) entitled "Culture: The Barrier which Blocks Regress to Beastly Ways" (1997). Mbeki, then Deputy President, begins with the Bible. And as he often does when citing the Bible to any great extent, he feels the need to apologise for so doing, adopting a jocular tone:

If you will permit this, let me start by citing some words from the Bible [either Matthew 16:26 or Mark 8:36]—"For what shall it benefit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

To which Pieter Dirk-Uys¹³¹ might remark that we must therefore proceed to set up a Ministry with the appropriate name of the Ministry for the Protection of the Soul, with himself as the Minister—naturally!

Mbeki then proceeds to what will become a key theme in his appropriation of the Bible, its focus, he believes, on matters of the soul, though his tone remains jocular. "After all", Mbeki continues, "we do have the Ministers entrusted with the task of ensuring that we do indeed gain the whole world, through the creation of jobs, building houses, supplying clean water, increasing investor confidence, acquiring covettes for the navy as well as judges to ensure that the Deputy President gets a higher salary".¹³²

130 Mbeki, *A National Strategic Vision for South Africa: Address by Deputy President T.M. Mbeki, at the Development Planning Summit, Hosted by the Intergovernmental Forum, 27 November 1995*, 1.

131 A South African comedian.

132 Mbeki, *Statement by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the Launch of Business Arts South Africa (Basa), Pretoria, 3 February 1997* (1997 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/docs/1997/tm1997/sp970204.pdf>.

Moving from the Bible to poetry, Mbeki cites W.B. Yeats, and then makes an overt connection between the poem and the Bible (and a line from William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*):

In one of his poems ["Sailing to Byzantium"], the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats writes:

An old man is but a paltry thing
A tattered coat upon a stick
Unless soul clap hands and sing and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress.

I think the Bible meant the same thing that Yeats celebrates in these lines—or rather, and to avoid the charge of sacrilege—Yeats understood what the Bible meant when it spoke of us standing in danger of losing our souls. To extend Yeats' imagery, we may perhaps say that we are all of us "a paltry thing" unless our souls sing and louder sing to give meaning, dignity and the elevation of humanity to the bodies which are us, but are, after all mere matter which as must for [citing in part Shakespeare] "golden lads and lasses [all must,] as for chimney-sweepers, turn [come] to dust".

The arts belong to that form of human and social existence which both the Bible and William Butler Yeats describe as the soul—the spiritual as opposed to the material, the spiritual which cannot exist without the corporeal, the capacity for noble thought which gives the human world the special dignity which separates the human from the rest of the animal world.¹³³

Important as material concerns are, we must make space for art and culture, Mbeki argues. In summing up his argument towards the end of the speech, Mbeki reiterates its key contours:

Let the formation of a new nation that has a soul be an inalienable part of our rebirth.

The business people who are here daily pursue the legitimate daily task of making profit. In the pursuit of that task they create jobs, help provide goods and services to serve the corporal beings that we are and help

133 Mbeki, *Statement by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the Launch of Business Arts South Africa (Basa)*, Pretoria, 3 February 1997, 1.

create the wealth without which human existence and progress are impossible.

But even they exist not as mere automatons to do all these things. They exist as human beings who laugh and cry, who love and hate, who are kind and cruel, who are human and animal.

I am deeply moved that we are able to meet today, the elected representatives of our people, the cultural workers, the profit makers, those who serve as they only stand and wait, to say together we shall each do what we have to do to contribute to the common effort to ensure that ours is a people that has recovered not only its freedom but its soul also.¹³⁴

Though in embryonic form, already there are clear signs of an emerging argument about the place of the Bible in the South African religio-social public realm. The Bible, like the arts, is about the soul, not the economy. Government and business, in a tensive alliance, are responsible for the economy, jointly overseeing “the legitimate daily task of making profit”. In what follows I will elaborate, showing clearly how Mbeki uses the Bible to designate two clearly separate social spheres, the moral and the economic, with the religious sector being responsible for the soul of the nation and the government the economy of the nation. In so doing, Mbeki uses the Bible to engage with both de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation.

In a speech to the International Labour Conference in 2003, Mbeki, now the President of South Africa, develops these ideas, engaging in an extended way with “the Parable of the Talents in the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew” (Matthew 25:14–30).¹³⁵ Here too the Bible and economic matters are brought into explicit conversation. He introduces the parable as follows, saying:

In the Parable of the Talents in the Biblical Gospel according to St Matthew, a money merchant, angry that one of his servants did not discharge his duties as a fund manager, by using the Talent given to him to trade in the money markets, said:

Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed;

¹³⁴ Mbeki, *Statement by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the Launch of Business Arts South Africa (Basa)*, Pretoria, 3 February 1997, 2–3.

¹³⁵ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference, 11 June 2003* (2003 [cited 28 May 2015]); available from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2003/mbeko611.htm>.

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.¹³⁶

He then immediately demonstrates that he understands how this parable might be read as a critique of the money merchant, locating Africans in solidarity with the “unprofitable servant”, saying:

Among the hundreds of millions of the African world from which we came, as we travelled to Europe, the outer darkness into which the money merchant cast his unprofitable servant, there is much weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those who do not hear and do not see the agony, have neither ears to hear nor eyes to see.

But I am certain that even they who do not see or hear the people, have seen the great volumes of literature that describe in the greatest statistical detail and graphic language, the extent of the poverty that afflicts billions in Africa and the rest of the developing world. . . .

The surfeit of information available to all of us says that we live in a world defined by a deep economic and social structural fault that mirrors the angry outburst of the money merchant of the Parable of the Talents, when he uttered the ominous curse not just to his servant, but to the poor of the world: “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”¹³⁷

Recognising, perhaps, that his appropriation of the Bible may seem a little out of place in Europe, he goes on to say, “Obviously, we have to explain what we have just said, lest we are accused of special pleading and being overly dramatic”.¹³⁸ Mbeki then does just this, arguing that,

¹³⁶ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

¹³⁷ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

¹³⁸ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

I am certain that the distinguished delegates here are all familiar with what is known as the Washington Consensus, developed in the early 1990's. This was a list of policy prescriptions that were said to be necessary to stimulate economic growth, especially in developing countries, ensuring, among other things, the necessary capital flows into countries that respected these prescriptions.

The prescriptions included trade liberalisation, fiscal discipline and 'sound' macro-economic policy, privatisation, deregulation, tax reform, absence of civil strife, democracy, promotion of inward investment, secure property rights, avoidance of 'crony capitalism', adherence to all manner of standards relating to banking and the financial markets, and others.

The rules that have been set tell the poor that unless they can reassure those that have, that more will be given to them, they must not expect that the haves will have any concern about the fate of those who have not.

Many developing countries, eager to secure much-needed investments to pull their peoples out of the morass of underdevelopment, embraced the Washington Consensus policy conditions for growth, and used whatever capacity they had to implement them.¹³⁹

The result, Mbeki goes on to state, is debt. "A weekly newsletter dated 12th April 2000, titled 'Sand in the Wheels', addresses", Mbeki informs his audience, "the question of capital flows in the context of the issue of the debt burden of poor countries. It said:

Nobody today contests the fact that the public debt is an intolerable burden for many countries and peoples of the South. Even the international financial institutions admit that this is so. Not that debt is the only reason for poverty, or for the widening gap between rich and poor, or for the blockage on development—but it sums up and amplifies these problems.¹⁴⁰

Mbeki continues his argument concerning debt by referring again to the newsletter he has already cited: "The newsletter to which we have referred is aptly

¹³⁹ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

¹⁴⁰ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

called 'Sand in the Wheels', and speaks eloquently of the cruel reality of the obstacles that ensures that many developing countries remain poor. It continues that:

Debt (also tells a story about) the state of relations between North and South. Structural adjustment programmes were imposed on countries of the South to restore their capacity for debt repayment, and caused further deterioration in the living conditions of the most fragile classes of the population. The financial transfers from South to North in service of the debt set a mortgage on all chances of development, representing as they do four times the OECD budget for public aid to development.¹⁴¹

Mbeki then returns to the Bible, elaborating on the parable he introduced earlier. "The money merchant in the Gospel according to St Matthew had said that 'For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath'".

Indeed, we have seen how in the last decade, as globalisation brought faster growth and better living conditions to some parts of the world, the majority of poor countries have become increasingly marginalised, sinking more and more into poverty. At the same time, many of these poor and developing countries spend their limited resources to train, develop and increase the capacity of their human resources. This, as we know, is one of the conditions for these countries to achieve sustained development, integrate into the global economy and begin to compete with the developed countries.

Unfortunately, however, these rich countries use their enormous resources to entice and recruit some of these skilled workers and professionals away from their poor homelands, to work in the developed countries. To those that have . . .

Much the same thing can be said about other matters, such as commodities, terms of trade, market access, access to affordable drugs and medicines, and others. To those that have . . .

Accordingly, the poor citizens of the world are right to pose the question to all of us at this conference and in other global forums—what can we

¹⁴¹ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

do together to end the intolerable situation foreseen in the Parable of the Talents!¹⁴²

Again the Bible has the capacity to 'foresee', but again it is not clear that it has the capacity to provide resources for substantive (economic) transformation. When it comes to an analysis of the global economic system, Mbeki draws from his own studies in economics, summarising what he has learnt by saying that amid the complexities of economic theory "we had to remember that the critical organising principle of the myriad of goings-on in the market place was the profit motive". And because "profit maximisation remains an immanent feature of the capitalist economy", Mbeki goes on to argue, Europe as well as Africa is "also affected by the process foreseen in the Parable of the Talents, with visible signs of widening disparities in wealth, growing impoverishment for some, increasing numbers of the working poor, and expanding numbers of people who have effectively dropped out of the labour market".¹⁴³

This brings Mbeki to a summation of his argument thus far, and again he invokes the Bible, saying, "The burden of our argument is that, as leaders of the peoples of the world, we have to understand properly and without prevarication, the facts available to all of us, which confirm the correctness of the prediction of the money merchant reported in the Gospel according to St Matthew".¹⁴⁴ Given the systemic dimensions of globalised capitalism, Mbeki goes on to call for action, arguing that, "The process of globalisation says this decision can no longer be taken solely at the national level. The war against global poverty calls for global action". But he recognises, declaring his own position on the necessity of working within the capitalist system, "meaningful ways and means have to be found to mobilise this capital to help finance the eradication of global poverty, in its own interest, while keeping in mind the feature central to its nature, of the maximisation of profit".¹⁴⁵

As Mbeki approaches the conclusion of his speech he invokes "the poor of the world", reminding his audience in Europe that:

The poor of the world watch and wait to see what decisions we will take and what programmes we will implement. These are the billions cast out into outer darkness, among whom there is much weeping and gnashing of teeth. They are convinced that collectively, we have the power to do something to change their condition, including putting them on the

142 Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

143 Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

144 Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

145 Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

ladder of opportunity that will lead to the eradication of poverty through decent work...¹⁴⁶

While Mbeki situates the poor of the world with “the unprofitable servant”, Mbeki seems content to reform rather than transform the money merchant’s economic system. The “peoples from whom I come, the Africans”, Mbeki continues, have made their own contribution to this project, through the launching of the African Union and its development programme, NEPAD (The New Partnership for Africa’s Development). “Through these processes”, Mbeki confirms,

the African masses have made the statement that they will act together, to end war and conflict on their continent, to end dictatorship and domination by corrupt elites, to use their means and capacities to end poverty and underdevelopment in Africa, to bring to a close the long period during which many in the world saw everything African as the very representation of human backwardness and barbarism.

At the same time, these African masses have made the call to the rest of the world to respond to the noble objective of human solidarity, by annulling the curse of the ancients, that billions of human beings shall be cast into the outer darkness, there to weep and gnash their teeth. I belong among the African masses that, for centuries, have been cast, like the unprofitable servant, into outer darkness, so that some should reap where they have sowed not, and gather where they have not strawed [sic].¹⁴⁷

Concluding, Mbeki offers a warning, saying if global action is not taken “we should not delude ourselves into believing that only the economists, the financiers, the politicians, the journalists, the propagandists, the lawyers, the statesmen, the prophets and the soothsayers, of whom Keynes spoke, have a voice”. Giving the Bible the last word, Mbeki continues:

We must remember that even those cast into the outer darkness, among whom there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, are also capable of speaking. And when they do speak in the end, on all continents, including where we are meeting, they will proclaim—we are the hope of the world, free at last of the curse of the money merchant!¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

¹⁴⁷ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

¹⁴⁸ Mbeki, *Speech at the International Labour Conference*.

This remarkable extended 'exegesis' of a biblical text demonstrates rather well Mbeki's ambivalence towards the Bible. Mbeki appropriates the Bible, not Christianity, separating the Bible from prevailing forms of African Christianity and reading it as a 'classic' text. Like other classic literature, the Bible has the capacity to generate a surplus of meaning that exceeds its contexts of production, meanings which have formed a reservoir within the public imagination and with which those who have an ear to hear might draw from. Having been somewhat cautious about engaging this reservoir of meaning in his early public persona, Mbeki chooses on particular occasions to plunge in and exploit the capacity of the Bible to provide a shared (re-nationalising) memory. However, Mbeki's interpretation of this parable is not a typical interpretation, for he tends to read against the grain of Matthew's redaction of the parable, discerning perhaps the 'original' meaning conveyed in Jesus' telling of the parable to the indebted peasants of his day. And yet Mbeki, unlike Jesus,¹⁴⁹ is not calling for a radical revolution of the world economy from the perspective of the unprofitable servant who refuses to participate in the exploitative system of the money merchant, for he embraces elements of Matthew's appropriation of the parable, in which the money merchant might reasonably expect a return on his investment.

Again, Mbeki's use of the Bible is a form of problematised appropriation. Appropriate he must, using the common silo that is the Bible to re-nationalise his people. But its capacity to speak into the South African public realm is restricted to its capacity to address the moral dilemmas of our day rather than to advocate for a radically different economic dispensation. Though Mbeki uses the Bible to foreground the harsh realities of the dominant global economic system, he also uses the Bible here to assert that there is no other viable option. De-nationalisation is the only realistic African option. Africans are trapped, reluctantly and not quietly, but inevitably, in a global economic order not of their making. This, Mbeki seems to say, is the message of the biblical parable.

At this point in my argument about Mbeki's use of the stolen Bible I need to be overt about my own ideo-theological orientation with respect to the Bible and economics (in case it is not readily apparent). I stand in the tradition of South African Black Theology and Contextual Theology, as well as the tradition of Tanzanian Ujamaa Theology, within which 'structural' analysis of the Bible's various ideological layers can and should be appropriated in order to address economic systems. However, I recognise that Norman Gottwald is right to caution those of us who would mobilise around the Bible for economic

149 Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 150–168.

transformation of the limits of our analogies. "Given the reality that economic systems cannot be 'imported' from the Bible to meet our needs," he says, "the ethical force of the Bible on issues of economics will have to be perspectival and motivational rather than prescriptive and technical".¹⁵⁰ Yet this kind of force is considerable, particularly if we agree with Gottwald that, "The dominant voices in biblical economic ethics are emphatically communitarian, resolutely critiquing tributary power by seeking state reforms, urging resistance to oppressive power, upbraiding ruthless exploiters and speaking to the collective religious conscience of a nation with a communitarian premise at its base".¹⁵¹ And, "When we interface communitarian biblical economic ethics with our own economic systems, the results are instructive", says Gottwald. "The biblical premise of the primacy of communal welfare over individual achievement is much closer to the premise of socialism than to those of capitalism".¹⁵² However, the Bible's sphere of influence for Mbeki is restricted to the domain of the soul, and perhaps its capacity to foresee, in broad terms, the moral shape of the predicaments that we must confront. The Bible is used, and its very use is a form of re-nationalising, but how it is used plays a role in Mbeki's attempts to de-nationalise the South African economy.

In his 2006 "State of the Nation Address", Mbeki uses a quotation from the biblical book of Isaiah to frame how he stands within the legacy of those who have gone before him. As is his custom, he uses the King James Version of the Bible, preferring its somewhat archaic and classical tone. Somewhat unusually, he then cites the isiXhosa translation, recognising perhaps that his habit of extensive citation of English literature (including the Bible in archaic English) is somewhat alienating for many South Africans:

I feel emboldened to appropriate for our people the promise contained in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah [Isaiah 55:12–13], when God said:

For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out in peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree . . .

150 Gottwald, "How Does Social Scientific Criticism Shape Our Understanding of the Bible as a Resource for Economic Ethics?," (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 345.

151 Gottwald, "Social Scientific Criticism as a Resource for Economic Ethics." 345.

152 Gottwald, "Social Scientific Criticism as a Resource for Economic Ethics." 346.

Kuba niya kuphuma ninovuyo,
 Nithundezwe ninoxolo.
 Iintaba neenduli ziya kugqabhuka
 Zimemelele phambi kwenu,
 Imithi yasendle ibethe izandla.
 Esikhundleni somqaqoba kuya kuphuma imisedare,
 Esikhundleni serhawu kuya kunyuka imirtile . . .¹⁵³

The focus of this speech is his reflection on the state of the nation within the “historic challenge” set before the nation by Nelson Mandela at “the very first Annual Regular Opening of our Democratic Parliament, on 24 May 1994”. Mandela posed the challenge then, Mbeki goes on to quote, in the following words: “we must, constrained by and yet regardless of the accumulated effect of our historical burdens, seize the time to define for ourselves what we want to make of our shared destiny”.¹⁵⁴ Mbeki uses these words of Mandela as a regular refrain throughout the speech; and he does the same with the Isaiah text.

In his usual style, Mbeki draws on a wide range of ‘classical’ literature in this speech, setting up this speech with quotations from Nelson Mandela, then South African poet Ingrid Jonker, then Shakespeare, and then the Bible. However, Mandela’s and the Bible’s words are given the most substantial rhetorical role, providing the speech with its thematic coherence. One of the things that becomes apparent from a close reading of Mbeki’s speeches is how fragile the coherence is. What often holds them together are regular rhetorical repetitions of particular phrases. This feature characterises the cadence of much of Mbeki’s speeches. In this speech Mandela’s and the Bible’s words syncopate.

The quotation from Mandela provides the challenge; the quotation from the (1611/1769 King James Version and the 1859/1975 isiXhosa version of the) Bible provides the promise. In his own words Mbeki acknowledges this, saying,

We have known that it would take considerable time before we could say we have eradicated the legacy of the past. We have expected that the circumstances handed down to us by our history would indeed condemn us to a “petty pace” [alluding to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*] of progress towards the achievement of the goal of a better life for all.

¹⁵³ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*, 3 February 2006 (2006 [cited 28 June 2015]); available from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/mbeko203.htm>. There are no ‘pages’ in this version.

¹⁵⁴ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

And yet today, as I stand here to speak . . . I feel emboldened to appropriate for our people the promise contained in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah [55:12–13a], when God said:

For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out in peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree . . .

Kuba niya kuphuma ninovuyo,
Nithundezwe ninoxolo.
Iintaba neenduli ziya kugqabhuka
Zimemelele phambi kwenu,
Imithi yasendle ibethe izandla.
Esikhundleni somqaqoba kuya kuphuma imisedare,
Esikhundleni serhawu kuya kunyuka imirtile . . .¹⁵⁵

He then summarises what he is about to elaborate in his speech in the following way, appropriating both Mandela and the Bible: “What has been achieved since Nelson Mandela delivered his first State of the Nation Address, and what we can do, given the larger resources that have since been generated, has surely given hope to the masses of our people, that it is possible for all Africa to hear the mountains and the hills singing before them”.¹⁵⁶ As I will argue more fully below, it is no accident that Mbeki invokes the Bible in the same breath as he invokes the masses. Ingrid Jonker and William Shakespeare resonate with the few; Mandela and the Bible with the masses.

Mbeki then goes on to argue that despite South Africa having been wracked with various forms of violence in the past fifteen years, both ordinary South Africans and South African business owners “are firmly convinced that our country has entered its Age of Hope”.¹⁵⁷ He then immediately links this “Age of Hope” with the promise of the prophet Isaiah, again quoting the extract cited above (but in English only), introducing the quotation by saying that “Through our National Effort they [the people of South Africa] can see the

¹⁵⁵ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁵⁶ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁵⁷ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

relevance to our situation of God's blessings communicated in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: ...¹⁵⁸

There are good reasons, continues Mbeki, for this "inspiring perspective about our future shared by the majority of our people", given the many "outstanding achievements" made by South Africans "in all walks of life"; achievements made in response, Mbeki says, "to the call made by Nelson Mandela in 1994 from this podium".¹⁵⁹ Once again the words of Mandela are quoted. Mandela's words are then invoked again a short while later as Mbeki turns from his analysis of the past to his hopes for the future. The achievements of the struggle against apartheid and the post-apartheid period have ushered in the "Age of Hope", he argues. Now, Mbeki continues, it is the government's responsibility to "play its role" in giving "new content to our Age of Hope".¹⁶⁰ He then enumerates and elaborates what the government is working on, focusing especially on the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA).¹⁶¹

Having outlined the ASGISA driven economic trajectories of the future, Mbeki draws to a close by stating that, "Clearly the masses of our people are convinced that our country has entered into its Age of Hope". Not only will their country "not disappoint" their expectations,

They are confident that what our country has done to move away from our apartheid past has created the conditions for them to appropriate God's blessing to the Prophet Isaiah:

For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.¹⁶²

"It is up to us", he concludes, "through our National Effort, to build a winning nation, to do all the things that will ensure that the mountains and the hills of

¹⁵⁸ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁵⁹ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁶⁰ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁶¹ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

¹⁶² Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

our country break forth into singing before all our people, and all the trees of the field clap their hands to applaud the people's season of joy. Thank you".¹⁶³

Here the Bible has taken centre-stage with Mandela, offering a vision that can be embraced by all South Africans, even the masses. Again, the role of the Bible is restricted to its poetic capacity, enhanced by the translation Mbeki has chosen, to orient us to a vision of the future, with the detail of that vision being filled from other sources. Again, the Bible is a resource both of re-nationalisation and of de-nationalisation. In terms of re-nationalisation Mbeki uses the Bible as a shared semiotic reservoir from which diverse sectors of South Africans are invited to drink as we together, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "seize the time to define for ourselves what we want to make of our shared destiny". In terms of de-nationalisation, Mbeki uses the policy framework of ASGISA, which he characterises as "a limited set of interventions that are intended to serve as catalysts to accelerated and shared growth and development", to provide the economic content to Isaiah's vision. And this ASGISA derived economic content, while driven by the need for redistribution, draws on capitalist development in order to do so.^{163a}

The most marked use of the Bible by Mbeki was in the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture.¹⁶⁴ What makes this occasion so significant is not only the substantial use he makes of the Bible, but how he creates a metaphor out of 'the RDP', dislocating it from economic matters, relocating and attaching it to moral matters. As indicated, so extensive is his use of the Bible in this lecture that he felt the need to point out in the oral presentation of the lecture that his extensive reference to the Bible did not mean that he was "about to become a priest".¹⁶⁵ Somewhat embarrassed by his constant reference to the Bible in front of the elites who attend such events, Mbeki nevertheless crafts a lecture deeply dependent on the Bible, mindful of the masses watching television or listening to the radio, for whom the Bible is a significant and sacred resource.

He begins the lecture by invoking the masses, saying, "I believe I know this as a matter of fact, that the great masses of our country everyday pray that the new South Africa that is being born will be a good, a moral, a humane and a caring South Africa which as it matures will progressively guarantee the hap-

¹⁶³ Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*.

^{163a} Mbeki, *State of the Nation Address*. See also Bassett, "South Africa: Revisiting Capital's 'Formative Action,'" *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 116, The politics of capital (2008).

¹⁶⁴ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

¹⁶⁵ Mbeki, "The Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture: Transcript of President Thabo Mbeki's Lecture, 29 July 2006."

piness of all its citizens". For this to happen, Mbeki continues, we must "infuse the values of Ubuntu into our very being as a people".¹⁶⁶

"But what", he goes on to ask, "is it that constitutes Ubuntu beyond the standard and yet correct rendition 'Motho ke motho ka motho yo mongoe: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'?! [A person is a person because of other people]" Remarkably, giving precedence to the Bible, granting it the prerogative to interpret the indigenous African concept 'ubuntu', in much the same way he had granted the Bible precedence over Yeats, he then turns, immediately, to the Bible, beginning a detailed exposition of Proverbs:

The Book of Proverbs in the Holy Bible contains some injunctions that capture a number of elements of what I believe constitute important features of the Spirit of Ubuntu, which we should strive to implant in the very bosom of the new South Africa that is being born, the food of the soul that would inspire all our people to say that they are proud to be South African!

The Proverbs say: [Proverbs 3:27–31]

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.

Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.¹⁶⁷

Having quoted the biblical text, he then goes on to appropriate it, adopting a preaching cadence in his delivery:

The Book of Proverbs assumes that as human beings, we have the human capacity to do as it says—not to withhold the good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of (our) hand to do it, and not to say NO to our neighbour, come again, and we will give you something tomorrow, even when we can give the necessary help today.

It assumes that we can be encouraged not to devise evil against our neighbours, with whom we otherwise live in harmony.

¹⁶⁶ Mbeki, "The Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture: Transcript of President Thabo Mbeki's Lecture, 29 July 2006."

¹⁶⁷ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

It assumes that we are capable of responding to the injunction that we should not declare war against anybody without cause, especially those who have not caused us any harm.

It urges that in our actions, we should not seek to emulate the demeanour of our oppressors, nor adopt their evil practices.¹⁶⁸

Alluding, once again, to the unrealistic expectations such a text might convey, he is quick to add:

I am conscious of the fact that to the cynics, all this sounds truly like the behaviour we would expect and demand of angels. I am also certain that all of us are convinced that, most unfortunately, we would find it difficult to find such angels in our country, who would number more than the fingers on two hands!

It may indeed very well be that, as against coming across those we can honestly describe as good people, we would find it easier to identify not only evil-doers, but also those who intentionally set out to do evil. In this regard, we would not be an exception in terms both of time and space.¹⁶⁹

To illustrate what he is saying Mbeki then turns to another classic text, Shakespeare's Richard III, in which the Duke of Gloucester "unashamedly declares his evil intentions" in the "Now is the winter of our discontent..." speech, in which the Duke of Gloucester conspires to set his brother and the king, "In deadly hate the one against the other".¹⁷⁰ This "open proclamation of evil intent", Mbeki continues, "stands in direct opposition to the directive in the Proverbs which says, 'Devise not evil against thy neighbour...'; and Mbeki returns to Proverbs 3, quoting verse 30, "Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm".¹⁷¹

By juxtaposing these poetic texts Mbeki makes the point that "the intention to do good, however noble in its purposes, does not guarantee that such good will be done". Nevertheless, he continues, the presence of "many Richard's" in our midst, should not mean that we should "avoid setting ourselves the goal

¹⁶⁸ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

¹⁶⁹ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

¹⁷⁰ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

¹⁷¹ Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

[set by the Bible] to do good!"¹⁷² What is needed, therefore, says Mbeki, is what Nelson Mandela called the need for an "RDP of the soul".¹⁷³

Mbeki admits that the RDP "was eminently about changing the material conditions of the lives of our people", and that, "It made no reference to matters of the soul, except indirectly".¹⁷⁴ He then assures his audience, quoting extracts from the original RDP document, that its concerns "were and remain critically important and eminently correct objectives that we must continue to pursue".¹⁷⁵ However, he goes on, deftly, to argue that the RDP's intention to improve the human condition implies a spiritual dimension. Human fulfilment, he says, consists of more than the access to "modern and effective services" promised by the RDP, "like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people".¹⁷⁶ "As distinct from other species of the animal world, human beings also have spiritual needs"; thus, he continues, "all of us and not merely the religious leaders speak of the intangible element that is immanent in all human beings—the soul!" What is more, he adds, "all human societies also have a soul!"¹⁷⁷

He then returns to the contrast between Proverbs and Richard III, and argues that "the construction of a humane and caring society... entails a struggle rather than any self-evident and inevitable victory of good over evil".¹⁷⁸ As in many of his speeches, Mbeki's rhetoric often exceeds the logic of his argument; but it is reasonably clear that what Mbeki is arguing here is that a substantial part of what we must do to succeed in our purpose of bringing about the good is to participate, both as individuals and as a society, in the RDP of the soul.

In the next part of his speech he elaborates on what the nation needs to do "to accomplish the RDP of its soul".¹⁷⁹ The background of the struggle facing us,

172 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

173 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

174 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

175 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

176 Mbeki returns here to the "almost biblical" character of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, citing some of its tenets. A sub-text of Mbeki's invocation of the RDP is, I think, his response to the critique levelled at the ANC by the South African Communist Party, as argued in the May 2006, Special Edition of *Bua Komanisi*: Information Bulletin of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party; SACP, "Special Edition". This incisive analysis considers in depth the ANC's betrayal of the African socialist vision of the RDP in favour of its neo-capitalist replacement project, GEAR.

177 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

178 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

179 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

Mbeki argues, is racial capitalism and its “well-entrenched value system that placed individual acquisition of wealth at the very centre of the value system of our society as a whole”.¹⁸⁰ Such a value system also “assumed a tolerant or permissive attitude towards such crimes as theft and corruption”.¹⁸¹ The next few pages of his speech elaborate on how the capitalist system displaced the values of human solidarity with the values of individual profit maximisation.¹⁸² This value system, Mbeki asserts, is what we have been “inherited”,¹⁸³ resulting in a society today in which for many “personal success and fulfilment means personal enrichment and striking public display of that wealth”.¹⁸⁴ Such values and attitudes “cannot but negate social cohesion and mutually beneficial human solidarity”, and bring about “the destruction of human society”. But, continues Mbeki, we must defeat “the tendency in our society towards the deification of personal wealth as the distinguishing feature of the new citizen of the new South Africa”.¹⁸⁵ The “deification” of wealth, rather than the systems that produce wealth, is now the focus.

As he develops his argument for an RDP of the soul, Mbeki, now mid-way through his speech, returns again to Proverbs, this time to Proverbs 6:6. The literary context of his speech in which he quotes the latter is worth indicating at some length:

With some trepidation, advisedly assuming that there is the allotted proportion of hardened cynics present here this evening,¹⁸⁶ I will nevertheless make bold to quote an ancient text which reads, in Old English [Proverbs 6:6–11]:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

180 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

181 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

182 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

183 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

184 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

185 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

186 Mbeki seems acutely aware of his two audiences and of their rather different attitudes to the Bible.

I know that given the level of education of our audience this evening,¹⁸⁷ the overwhelming majority among us will know that I have extracted the passages I have quoted from the Book of Proverbs contained in the St James' edition of the Holy Bible.

It may be that the scepticism of our age has dulled our collective and individual sensitivity to the messages of this Book of Faith and all the messages that it seeks to convey to us.

In this regard, I know that I have not served the purposes of this Book well, by exploiting the possibility it provides to say to you and everybody else who might be listening, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise".¹⁸⁸

Here Mbeki not only engages with the text in detail, he distances himself from the educated, elitist, liberal, and sceptical attitudes that may dismiss his references to the Bible. He even deprecates his own grasp of the text. Though there is some coyness, embarrassment, and humour here, as is evident in the oral presentation, Mbeki is also deeply serious.

He realises that citing "from the Book of Proverbs will, at best, evoke literary interest and at worst a minor theological controversy", but his "own view is that the Proverbs raise important issues that bear on what our nation is trying to do to define the soul of the new South Africa".¹⁸⁹

I believe they communicate a challenging message about how we should respond to the situation immanent in our society concerning the adulation of personal wealth and the attendant tendency to pay little practical regard to what each one of us might do to assist our neighbour to achieve the goal of a better life.¹⁹⁰

Mbeki invokes the hardworking and communal ant of Proverbs in order to argue that the nation "must develop the wisdom that will ensure the survival

187 Mbeki recognises that his immediate educated audience would recognise his biblical allusions/quotations, even though (as he has implied earlier) they may not take the Bible seriously. Beyond this immediate audience is another larger less formally educated audience who would not only recognise but also 'believe' the Bible.

188 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

189 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

190 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

and cohesion of human society”.¹⁹¹ He realises that “many among us might very well think” that he is indulging in wishful thinking in “trying to wish away the waves of self-aggrandisement that might be characteristic of global human society”,¹⁹² so he strengthens his argument—by quoting another biblical text. The text he chooses is from the book of Genesis, and again he states explicitly that he is ‘returning’ to “the Holy Bible”. The Genesis text he quotes is 3:19, and on this occasion the reference is given: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).¹⁹³

“This biblical text suggests”, argues Mbeki, “that of critical importance to every South African is consideration of the material conditions of life and therefore the attendant pursuit of personal wealth”.¹⁹⁴ The point he seems to be making here, though again the logic is not that clear, is that immediate material means are important, perhaps even foundational. He supports this biblical claim by a fairly extensive appropriation of the materialist philosophy of Friederich Engels, Karl Marx, and Vladimir Lenin, citing from their work.¹⁹⁵ However, he then immediately juxtaposes ‘materialism’ with ‘idealism’ in order to make the related point that materialist concerns cannot be allowed to be our only concerns. “In the context of our own challenges, this ‘idealism’ must serve to focus our attention on issues other than the tasks of the production and distribution of material wealth”.¹⁹⁶

What Mbeki does through this intertextual exchange is to inaugurate a discussion of the relationship between materialism and idealism. This discussion is not that easy to follow, but he seems to be saying that though Marx and the Genesis text are legitimately concerned about material considerations, we must not abandon aspects of idealism, which, as we might now suspect, he also finds in the Bible, this time citing John’s gospel [John 1:1]: “In the beginning was the Word”.¹⁹⁷ Our preoccupation, Mbeki seems to be arguing, has been with Marx’s “Man must eat before he can think!”, whereas we should also be considering Rene Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am”.¹⁹⁸ The Bible is useful

191 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

192 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

193 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

194 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

195 In his speeches Mbeki regularly appropriates Marxist rhetoric. In this instance the appropriation is ambivalent. Rhetorically he shows he knows his Marx, but he also indicates that ideologically he is not fully persuaded.

196 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

197 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

198 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

in exploring this tension because it acknowledges the need for both bread and soul, body and mind/Word (and de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation).

Mbeki interrupts his argument at this stage in his speech to deal overtly with his prolific use of the Bible: "I am certain that many in this auditorium have been asking themselves the question why I have referred so insistently on the Christian Holy Scriptures. Let me explain".¹⁹⁹ The crux of his explanation is that in the context of South Africa's daily economic deliberations, the debate itself "must tell us that human life is about more than the economy and therefore material considerations". This is important, Mbeki continues, because, he says, "I believe that as a nation we must make a special effort to understand and act on this because of what I have said already, that personal pursuit of material gain, as the beginning and end of life purpose, is already beginning to corrode our social and national cohesion".²⁰⁰

What this means, Mbeki goes on to state, is "that when we talk of a better life for all, within the context of a shared sense of national unity and national reconciliation, we must look beyond the undoubtedly correct economic objectives our nation has set itself".²⁰¹ It is not GEAR, the government's neo-liberal capitalist macro-economic policy, Mbeki implies, that is to blame for the systems that enable the personal pursuit of material gain. It is some moral failing that requires an RDP of the soul. The RDP as a macro-economic policy has been rhetorically replaced by an RDP of the soul.

The speech now makes a somewhat abrupt digression from South African concerns to the situation in the Middle East, though he hangs on to his economic thread, implying that the crisis in the Middle East is economically induced.²⁰² Drawing again on the poetry of William Butler Yeats, from "The Second Coming", Mbeki appeals to his audience not to allow a "monstrous beast" to be born from South Africa's new Jerusalem.²⁰³ He continues, alluding perhaps to the novel by Chinua Achebe,²⁰⁴ by saying "that for us to ensure that things do not fall apart, we must in the first instance, never allow that the market should be the principal determinant of the nature of our society".²⁰⁵ An RDP of the soul enables a decentring of the market, but does not negate or

199 As indicated above, it is at this point that Mbeki makes an aside, saying, "Do not worry, I am not about to become a priest" Mbeki, "The Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture: Transcript of President Thabo Mbeki's Lecture, 29 July 2006."

200 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

201 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

202 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

203 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

204 Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

205 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

even interrogate the systemic nature of the market. Instead of placing the market at the centre, a centre which cannot hold, Mbeki seems to argue, we must place social cohesion and human solidarity, in a word, Ubuntu, at the centre.²⁰⁶

Continuing his critique of the market, but without saying anything about the place of the market in his government's macro-economic policy, Mbeki returns to the Bible as a resource for resisting "the demons that W.B. Yeats saw slouching towards Bethlehem to be born":

We must therefore say that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that "Man cannot live by bread alone" [Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4] and therefore that the mere pursuit of individual wealth can never satisfy the need immanent in all human beings to lead lives of happiness.²⁰⁷

This is Mbeki's final reference to the Bible. He shifts his attention in the final few pages of his speech to emphasising our need for a "cohesive human society";²⁰⁸ praising the South African nation's gains and pointing to the dangers that persist from our past. In the case of South Africa, he concludes,

we should say that we are fortunate that we had a Nelson Mandela who made bold to give us the task to attend to the "RDP of the soul", and lent his considerable weight to the achievement of the goal of national reconciliation and the achievement of the goal of a better life for all our people.

... In this regard, he was conscious of the task we share as Africans to end the conflicts on our Continent, many of which are driven by the failure to effect the RDP of the African soul, to uphold the principles of Ubuntu, consciously to strive for social cohesion, human solidarity and national reconciliation.²⁰⁹

Again, the Bible and Mandela, together with a host of other more minor sources, construct a path for the recovery of the African soul. The cost is that the Reconstruction and Development Programme has become a cipher—'RDP'. The forced removal of 'RDP' from the economy to morality has been accomplished, eloquently, and the Bible has played a prominent role.

206 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

207 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

208 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

209 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

The Bible is used by Mbeki both to de-nationalise and re-nationalise. Its role in re-nationalisation is to claim it as a communal South African nation-building resource, but in strictly moral terms. Its role in de-nationalising is to make it clear to South African Black Theology and South African Contextual Theology that socialist economic policies are unrealistic and that the government (together with the business sector) has the macro-economic context in hand, having decentred the market while accepting that some compliance with global capitalism is not only inevitable but also responsible.

In all of these examples of Mbeki's invocation of the Bible, and my selection is representative and substantive though not exhaustive, there are common concerns, but also some subtle shifts. Mbeki remains concerned about the African soul, but we can discern a shift from a soul that includes a socio-cultural breadth to a narrower Church-Theology-type moral soul. We see too a growing awareness in Mbeki that he is addressing at least two audiences, a small classically literate and vaguely liberal elite who are somewhat embarrassed by religion (as is Mbeki himself) and a large mass of religious believers, most of whom are Christians. Mbeki wants to address them both, and the Bible (having been effectively separated from Christianity) lends itself to this task. It remains classic literature, even for Mbeki and the post-colonial African elite. And it resonates with the believing religious masses, for it remains a favoured and useful sacred silo.

The Church Theology Bible: After Prophetic Theology

In order to understand Mbeki's turn to what *The Kairos Document* identified as 'Church Theology', it is important to return in more detail to a sister theological trajectory alongside that of South African Black Theology, namely South African Contextual Theology.

The South African apartheid state, with its overt theological foundation, demonised liberation theology and relentlessly detained anyone associated with such forms of theology. The term 'contextual theology' was coined to subvert the apartheid state's efforts, and became "an umbrella term embracing a variety of particular or situational theologies" in South Africa.²¹⁰ Unfortunately, however, because of a lack of sustained collaboration between Latin American-derived contextual theologies and Black Theology-derived

210 Speckman and Kaufmann, "Editors' Preface," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), xi.

liberation theologies,²¹¹ 'contextual theology' also came to be considered as another, separate, form of South African liberation theology.

In its particular form, Contextual Theology (and the upper case is appropriate here) clusters around at least four poles. The first is the work of Albert Nolan, who drew on elements of Latin American Liberation Theology and re-contextualised and popularised them in South Africa.²¹² The second coordinating point for Contextual Theology was the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), an institution within which Nolan worked for many years, but which included the contributions of a host of church leaders and Christian activists of all kinds, many of whom later went into the ANC Alliance government.²¹³ At its inaugural conference in 1982, Albert Nolan characterised the vision of the Institute for Contextual Theology as follows, and in doing so provided a foundational understanding of Contextual Theology itself. The ICT, Nolan said,

wants to do theology quite explicitly and consciously from within the context of real life in South Africa. It wants to start from the fundamentally political character of life in South Africa. It wants to take fully into account the various forms of oppression that exist in South Africa: racial oppression, the oppression of the working class and the oppression of women. And finally it wants to start from the actual experience of the oppressed themselves.²¹⁴

The third pole, and the most significant for the purposes of this chapter, around which Contextual Theology in its particular form has located itself is

211 Cochran, "Questioning Contextual Theology," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 70–73; Maluleke, "Theology in (South) Africa: How the Future Has Changed," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 368.

212 Kaufmann, "Good News to the Poor: The Impact of Albert Nolan on Contextual Theology in South Africa," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001); see Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (vol. edition no. 2; Cape Town: David Philip, 1986); Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel*.

213 Cochran, "Questioning Contextual Theology." The most notable include Frank Chikane, Smangalis Mkhathshwa, and Bernadette Ncube.

214 Cited in Kaufmann, "Good News to the Poor: The Impact of Albert Nolan on Contextual Theology in South Africa," 23–24.

The Kairos Document.²¹⁵ *The Kairos Document* was important both as a process and a product. As a product, *The Kairos Document* gave expression to the radical notion that 'Theology' is not monovocal, but is profoundly contested. *The Kairos Document* identified and analysed three contending theologies in the South Africa of the 1980s: State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic Theology. Briefly, "State Theology" was identified as the theology of the South African apartheid State which "is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy".²¹⁶ "Church Theology", it was argued, was in a limited, guarded and cautious way critical of apartheid. "Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter-productive because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times, it relies upon a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation".²¹⁷ *The Kairos Document* deconstructs these two forms of theology and advocates for a "Prophetic Theology", a theology which "speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis, a response that does not give the impression of sitting on the fence but is clearly and unambiguously taking a stand" against the apartheid state.²¹⁸

While *The Kairos Document* had a number of shortcomings, especially its failure to engage overtly with South African Black Theology and its failure to recognise the ideological nature of the Bible,²¹⁹ it did make a massive impact on how activists thought about religion, particularly Christianity, during the struggle for liberation. Roundly and publically condemned by the apartheid state, *The Kairos Document* was also rejected by many of the institutional churches, including the so-called 'English-speaking churches'.²²⁰ Theology that

215 Kairos, *Challenge to the Church: The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: The Kairos theologians, 1985).

216 Kairos, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 3. My citations are from the Revised Second Edition.

217 Kairos, *The Kairos Document*, 9.

218 Kairos, *The Kairos Document*, 18.

219 West, "Tracing the 'Kairos' Trajectory from South Africa (1985) to Palestine (2009): Discerning Continuities and Differences," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143 (2012).

220 Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of the English-Speaking Churches in South Africa, 1903–1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987); van der Water, "A Legacy for Contextual Theology: Prophetic Theology and the Challenge of the Kairos," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 36–43.

was made in the streets rather than in ecclesiastically controlled sites could not be proper theology, the 'mainline' (Settler Initiated Churches) claimed. Subsequent responses were more considered, but their spokesmen (mainly) still found it difficult to acknowledge that the theology of the church had failed to read "the signs of the times", a key concept in *The Kairos Document*. That the public theology of the churches, 'Theology' with a capital 'T', was either a form of State Theology or Church Theology struck a theological nerve. Significantly, this analysis remains relevant for South Africa's post-liberation context, for what Thabo Mbeki is advocating for the Bible is a form of Church Theology; the innovation in post-liberation South Africa is that State Theology becomes Church Theology.

Theological process is the fourth pole around which Contextual Theology could be said to cluster. As a liberation theology, theological process was of particular importance to Contextual Theology. Describing the process that produced *The Kairos Document*, Nolan emphasised that "it was not planned or foreseen by the staff of ICT. It simply happened as a result of ICT's method of doing theology". Nolan then goes on to briefly characterise this method, saying that ICT "simply enables people to do their own theological reflection upon their own praxis and experience", by "bringing Christians together, facilitating discussion and action, recording what people say, and doing whatever research may be required to support the reflections, arguments and actions of the people".²²¹ Using this method, two ICT staff members facilitated a process, beginning in Soweto "one Saturday morning in July 1985", "to reflect upon South Africa's latest crisis, the recently declared State of Emergency".²²² This led to *The Kairos Document*, a theological document that

was vividly and dramatically contextual: it came straight out of the flames of the townships in 1985. Those who had no experience of the oppression, the repression, the suffering and the struggles of the peoples in the townships at the time were not able to understand the faith questions that were being tackled there, let alone the answers.²²³

While Contextual Theology after liberation has produced nothing as prophetically seminal as *The Kairos Document*, and while the Institute for Contextual Theology is more or less defunct, its theological processes have been taken up

²²¹ Nolan, "Kairos Theology," in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (eds. de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio; Cape Town: David Philip, 1994), 212.

²²² Nolan, "Kairos Theology," 213.

²²³ Nolan, "Kairos Theology," 213.

by, for example, the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (referred to in the previous chapter).

Speaking directly to the prophetic theologians that have entered his government,²²⁴ as well as those who have adopted a stance towards his government of 'critical solidarity',²²⁵ Mbeki redeploys their Bibles, away from engagement with the economic sphere and towards the moral sphere. But again, it would be wrong to ascribe too much weight to Mbeki's contribution, for he stands, as he repeatedly indicates, within the trajectory of Mandela.

Among the outcomes Mbeki accomplishes in his seminal Nelson Mandela Lecture are a severing of the RDP from the economic-political domain and its re-attachment to the moral-spiritual domain. It is not GEAR, the Mbeki driven neoliberal capitalist macro-economic policy that has constructed a system which enables material gain. The problem is the person or persons not the system. An RDP of the economy has been replaced by an RDP of the soul. A related outcome is the return of religion to the public realm, but narrowly construed as religion centred on the soul, a form of Church Theology Christianity, in which the focus of religion is the realm of morality, itself narrowly defined. This is a form of theology that is more concerned with legitimating, sustaining, and consolidating the structures that constitute the status quo of the church and state than with the challenges, questions, and critiques posed by the pain these structures perpetrate and perpetuate. And it is Nelson Mandela who introduces this trajectory, albeit in an incipient form.

Mandela's Bible: Mandela's Methodism

Nelson Mandela said very little about religion, in the public sphere. Honouring our religiously neutral state,²²⁶ Mandela was cautious about saying anything too explicit about the role of religion in the public realm. But we can find important fragments, which taken together constitute the beginning of the ideotheological trajectory that Mbeki consolidates and deploys in the public realm.

224 See the related Ujamaa Centre project, Leonard, Gary S.D. "A Convention on Power, Morality, Ethics, and Transformation: 2nd Convention between Churches and Theologians in Government." Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council Consortium and the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005.

225 Mabuza, "Church-State Relations: An Exploration of the Notion of 'Critical Solidarity' in South Africa," in *e-Praxis* (2005).

226 van der Vyver, "Constitutional Perspectives of Church-State Relations in South Africa," *Brigham Young University Law Review* (1999).

In an address to the South African parliament on the 5th February 1999 Nelson Mandela stated: “Our nation needs, as [a] matter of urgency . . . an ‘RDP of the Soul’”.²²⁷ This very brief assertion, with its deliberate allusion to the government’s inaugural (but, by this time, abandoned) macro-economic policy, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), has clear allusions to religion. Five days later, Mandela reiterates this phrase in his closing address to the debate on his 1999 State of Nation speech, claiming that “many sectors have resolved to join hands to work for the moral regeneration of our society, its ‘RDP of the soul’”.²²⁸

Four days later he is much more explicit, having moved from political terrain to religious terrain. In a speech to a Methodist church in Langa, Cape Town, he delves more deeply into how he understands the role of religion in the public realm:

In Parliament last week we discussed the need for an RDP of the soul. These last years have shown how deep the poison of an inhuman system seeped into the fabric of our society. We have been distressed to learn that amongst those who fought for freedom are people who have turned out as corrupt or self-seeking, if not more so, than those they replace. The best efforts of government to bring lasting change for the better will fail if we do not repair the moral fabric of our society. Greed and disrespect for others; a lack of community feeling and social responsibility—these are spiritual enemies of our efforts to build a new society in which we can live in harmony with one another, in peace and prosperity. As religion fortified us in resisting oppression, we know that it can help strengthen us to carry out the mission that history has given to our generation and the next—to make a reality of our hopes for a better life for all.²²⁹

The elements of Mbeki’s argument are apparent. Corruption and “self-seeking” are personal traits, formed in part by “the poison of the inhuman system” of

227 Mandela, *Address by President Nelson Mandela to Parliament, 5 February 1999* (ANC, 1999 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/address-president-nelson-mandela-parliament-o>.

228 Mandela, *Closing Address by President Nelson Mandela in the Debate on the State of the Nation Address, 10 February 1999* (ANC, 1999 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/closing-address-president-nelson-mandela-debate-state-nation-address>.

229 Mandela, *Mandela Speech at a Methodist Church Service in Langa, 14 February 1999* (ANC, 1999 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/mandela-speech-methodist-church-service-langa>.

apartheid, but unrelated to the systems of the government's macro-economic policy. Indeed, the systems put in place by the government in order to bring about "lasting change" are represented as good, but destined to fail if the religious sector does not make its contribution in repairing "the moral fabric of our society".

Not only is Mandela the one who has summoned religion to a national public role, he is also the one who has sketched the parameters of religion's public role. His call to the religious sector is reiterated, with a wider scope, in the African National Congress's 1999 Election Manifesto, where it is stated that, "The struggle to build a better future for all requires, not just material transformation, but an *RDP of the Soul*. The ANC calls upon all communities of faith, to be active *partners in shaping our moral vision*, and in fostering the moral renewal of our society".²³⁰ And while the call of the ANC for an "RDP of the Soul" is not directed to the religious sector exclusively,²³¹ it is clearly the primary sector being addressed.

Five years later, in delivering the 5th Steve Biko Lecture, Nelson Mandela elaborates on what he sees as the moral substance of an "RDP of the Soul":

We South Africans have succeeded quite admirably in putting in place policies, structures, processes and implementation procedures for the transformation and development of our country. We are widely recognised and praised for having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. The solidity of our democratic order, with all of its democracy supporting structures and institutions, is beyond doubt. Our economic framework is sound and we are steadily making progress in bringing basic services to more and more of our people.

It is at the level of, what we once referred to as the RDP of the soul that we as a nation and people might have crucially fallen behind since the attainment of democracy. The values of human solidarity that once drove our quest for a humane society seem to have been replaced, or are being threatened, by a crass materialism and pursuit of social goals of instant gratification. One of the challenges of our time, without being pietistic or moralistic, is to re-instil in the consciousness of our people that sense

230 ANC, *Elections 1999 Manifesto: Together, in Every Sector, Fighting for Change* (ANC, 1999 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2546>. The emphasis is in the original.

231 Gigaba, "The Development State as a Social Construct," in *Umrabulo* (vol. 32 of: ANC, 2010).

of human solidarity, of being in the world for one another and because of and through others.²³²

The two paragraphs neatly separate the spheres of South African public life. At the level of social systems, we “have succeeded quite admirably in putting in place policies, structures, processes and implementation procedures for the transformation and development of our country”. This is “beyond doubt”, Mandela insists. Singling out the economic domain, Mandela is confident that “[o]ur economic framework is sound”. It is at the level of the soul that we “have crucially fallen behind”. And although reluctant to appear “pietistic or moralistic”, Mandela invokes these terms in order to demarcate the domain of “[o]ne of the challenges of our time”. In Mandela’s conceptualisation of the trajectory of an “RDP of the Soul”, there is a separation between social spheres, with the legal, political, and economic on one side and the moral on the other side. The legal, political, and economic domains, the domains of the government sector, Mandela asserts, are working well. However, the moral domain, the responsibility (primarily) of the religious sector, lags behind, and requires more attention.

Significantly, in his speech to the Langa Methodist church cited above, Mandela laments “the poison of an inhuman system” that has “seeped into the fabric of our society”. Apartheid is recognised as a ‘system’, but the “crass materialism” of his Steve Biko Lecture is a personal, not a systemic, problem. An “RDP of the Soul” is therefore about a personal and a collective-national morality; it assumes that the problem lies in part with individuals who have lost their “sense of human solidarity”.

It would be from these fragments that Mbeki would forge his more carefully crafted argument, utilising the Bible as one of his tools, as we have seen. And, as we will see, Mbeki’s religious rhetoric would become ANC religious policy.

The ANC Bible: The RDP of the Soul

While Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture prepared the ground rhetorically for a shift from an RDP of the economy to an RDP of the soul, the ANC’s 2007 policy document, “The RDP of the Soul”,²³³ turns rhetoric into policy. “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document was produced by the ANC Commission on

232 Mandela, *5th Steve Biko Lecture by Former President Nelson Mandela*, 10 September 2004 (ANC, 2004 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2875>.

233 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul* (ANC, 2007 [cited 29 May 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2373>.

Religious Affairs, and sets out to frame the ANC's understanding of the role of religion in the public realm.²³⁴

While this policy document locates itself within the trajectory of Mbeki's rhetoric, it provides a rather different analysis in two key respects. First, morality is understood as about more than individual responsibility; morality is also about systems, especially economic systems. Second, there is no privileging of any one religious tradition. An inclusive and broad understanding of 'religion' is used in this document, including even "the spirit of democracy" and "humanists" in its range.²³⁵ However, while the document claims that "the ANC has a major responsibility to spell out the dangers when people promote organisations which are opposed to the spiritual or material development of our people, whatever religious credentials they may claim",²³⁶ it is not clear that religion has a similar responsibility to spell out the dangers of the ANC's macro-economic policy. Indeed, the "recovery of soul in the secular world moves us onward", the document argues somewhat obscurely, from thinking of economics "in terms of a conflict between earlier capitalist and socialist systems".²³⁷ Instead of urging "progressive" religion to contend with government's economic analysis and policy, "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document envisages a form of religion that accepts the ANC's rather vague blend of capitalism and socialism. Furthermore, while "The RDP of the Soul" invokes an ANC that has the responsibility to address the religious sector directly, it cannot quite imagine, despite its commendations of progressive forms of religion, the religious sphere having a similar responsibility to address the state.

"The RDP of the Soul" policy document's representation of religion is in some respects quite different from Mbeki's, though there is some significant overlap, not least in the forced removal of 'RDP' from the economy to the soul. The preamble to the policy document "The RDP of the Soul" makes the link to Mbeki's Nelson Mandela Lecture clear, following the document's statement of intent with a quotation from that lecture:

234 The information included on the production of this document and its reception and discussion within the ANC is based on discussions with and correspondence from Cedric Mayson, the Coordinator of the ANC Commission on Religious Affairs at the time. While writing this I learned of his death on the 23rd May 2015; hamba kahle comrade, may your yearning for a form of religion that brings liberation find us faithful. Much of the analysis and many of the arguments found in this Document were presented for discussion by the ANC Commission for Religious Affairs in the November 2006 edition of *Umrabulo*, a journal of the African National Congress; see ANC, "From Liberation to Transformation: Spiritual Revolution in Secular Society," in *Umrabulo* (vol. 27 of, 2006).

235 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

236 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

237 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

This document reviews the problems we found in Liberation, analyses them, and sets out the way of Transformation through the reconstruction and development of the nation's spirit. For it is the spirit of South Africans that drives our political, economic and social processes.

"The question must therefore arise—for those of us who believe that we represent the good—what must we do to succeed in our purposes? . . . We must strive to understand the social conditions that would help to determine whether we succeed or fail. What I have said relates directly to what needs to be done to achieve the objective that Nelson Mandela set the nation, to accomplish the RDP of the Soul". Thabo Mbeki²³⁸

The first part of the policy document, headed "Liberation Brought Us a Packet of Problems", analyses the "packet of problems" liberation brought the ANC, under the following sub-headings: "The RDP", "Lack of Experience", "The Population Explosion", "The Dictatorship of Capital", "The Western Imperialist Empire", "Corruption", "Crime", and "The Media".²³⁹ While there is no explicit or implied reference to religion in the analysis under the first three sub-headings, there is under the remaining sub-headings. Under the sub-heading "The Dictatorship of Capital", the document states: "An economic system which allows dictators to administer capital without responsibility to anyone is wrong in principle for those who believe in the spirit of democracy".²⁴⁰ This general ethical statement is then followed by a more religion specific statement: "To maintain that it is a legitimate human right to accumulate wealth through a system condemning the majority of our citizens to poverty is totally illegitimate. It is condemned by religious prophets, humanists and economists alike".²⁴¹

Already we can discern the shape of this policy document's engagement with religion. First, though the "The RDP of the Soul" takes Mbeki's moral perspective as its starting point, there is a clear recognition of the systemic nature of wealth accumulation. Here morality is about more than individual responsibility; morality is also about systems, especially economic systems. However, as we will see later on, the "The RDP of the Soul" refuses to take sides on economic systems, imagining that the kind of RDP of the soul it envisages will take, somehow, South Africans beyond both capitalism and socialism. In this

238 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

239 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*. The use of upper and lower case in sub-headings is not consistent, but I have regularised the usage.

240 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

241 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

respect the argument of the “The RDP of the Soul” sounds similar to the argument of what *The Kairos Document* called ‘Church Theology’.

As a second distinctive feature, the “The RDP of the Soul” is careful to refrain from privileging any one religious tradition. An inclusive and broad understanding of ‘religion’ is deployed here, including even “the spirit of democracy” and “humanists” in its range. The systemic dimensions of morality are developed more fully further on under this sub-heading, with the policy document declaring that: “The economic problem of the poor is the spiritual problem of the rich. To move from the greed of the rich to the need of the poor we must change the system. We need a new spirit—an RDP of the soul”.²⁴²

Under the sub-heading of “The Western Imperialist Empire” another, third, feature of this Document’s take on religion becomes apparent. Arguing that the “dictatorship of capital is an integral part of the centuries old western imperialist Empire which is dominated today by the United States of America”, the “The RDP of the Soul” goes on to say that, “US efforts to indoctrinate Africa with fears of Islamic terrorism, to establish a US Military mission in every African country, to control our media, our financiers, our religions and our politicians. . . .inhibits our transformation”.²⁴³ Again we see an inclusive conception of religion, with a specific reference to Islam and a rejection of US definitions and portrayals of this religious tradition.²⁴⁴ But the “The RDP of the Soul” goes further, making it clear later on in the Document that the reference to US attempts to control “our religions” includes not only their characterisation of Islam, but also the influence of US forms of fundamentalist Christianity on South African Christianity.

There is no specific reference to religion under the sub-heading of “Corruption”, but there is extensive use of ‘morality’ language. The sub-section begins by acknowledging that South Africa has “inherited a culture of corruption” established by colonialism and that corruption continues to be a concern, even within the ANC. “Many in society”, the sub-section goes on to argue,

²⁴² ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁴³ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁴⁴ The only other mention of religion in any of the other twelve Polokwane policy documents is found in the Policy Discussion Document on “International Relations: A Just World and a Better Africa is a Possibility”, and here too Islam receives a specific mention, along similar lines: “The world is becoming divided on the basis of religion and we see forms of discrimination occurring in the name of fighting terrorism. While terrorism is the new threat to peace and stability and has to be defeated including its fundamental causes, we need to take extra care that we do not antagonise people on the basis of religious intolerance and discrimination”; ANC, *International Relations: A Just World and a Better Africa Is a Possibility* (2007 [cited 7 August 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2370>.

“openly and avowedly promote self-centred, political and economic policies which worship anti-human greed, promote their own profit, and side line the needs of the poor and the survival of humanity”.²⁴⁵ At this point the “The RDP of the Soul” again invokes Mbeki’s Nelson Mandela Lecture where Mbeki argues the: “The capitalist class, to whom everything has a cash value, has never considered moral incentives as very dependable”, entrenching in our society as a whole, “including among the oppressed, the deep seated understanding that personal wealth constituted the only true measure of individual and social success”. Indeed, the “The RDP of the Soul” continues, quoting Mbeki, even “the new order, born of 1994, inherited a well-entrenched value system that place individual acquisition of wealth at the very centre of the value system of our society as a whole”.²⁴⁶ This sub-section concludes with a succinct statement: “The root of the problem is the corruption of thought and motive. If the primary objective of life is to get rich, the means are secondary”.²⁴⁷ Again we see some recognition of the systemic nature of corruption as well as the impact of empire, but the focus is firmly on the individual and the individual’s values, thoughts, and motives.

This focus is sustained in the next sub-section dealing with “Crime”, though the starting point is profoundly systemic. Crime is situated, at least initially, within an unjust and unconstitutional “economic structure”, for, “In hard fact the economic structure of South Africa condemns half our population to very limited life”.²⁴⁸ And while, the Document asserts, “This economic system does not justify those who steal to live”, it does recognise that “many turn to crime from need”.²⁴⁹ The “The RDP of the Soul” then turns to “crimes of greed” and the value system that undergirds it. Such a system, which is “directly related to the worship of money and possessions”, is “denounced by all religions and ethicists”.²⁵⁰ Again we find many of the features of this Document’s analysis of religion: a recognition of a systemic root to crime, a broadening of what is meant by ‘religion’, and a focus on personal morality. This sub-section concludes with an emphasis on the last of these. All crimes, whether of need, greed, or violence, “are produced by the deliberate promotion of a community without moral integrity”.²⁵¹ It is here, the “The RDP of the Soul” argues, that the religious sector must accept substantial responsibility for the “promotion of

245 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

246 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

247 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

248 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

249 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

250 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

251 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

false inhuman values". "Because the main focus of much religion has moved to financial support for institutions, and individualistic concern for the after life, many have excluded themselves from its theological, ethical and social emphasis, with a consequent collapse of value systems". In sum, the sub-section concludes, "Crime is the result of spiritual failure".²⁵² A fourth distinctive feature in the Document's analysis of religion emerges here, namely, the damage done by institutionalised religion in failing to hold together the individual and the social. Ironically, there is a tendency both in "The RDP of the Soul" policy document and in Mbeki's Nelson Mandela Lecture of precisely the same dislocation.

The final sub-section of the first part of the policy document, on "The Media", is brief, but the argument is clear. The media is often irresponsible in handling its freedom, "portraying western oppressive values, instead of the liberating values of ubuntu thinking".²⁵³ A fifth distinctive feature in the Document's analysis becomes readily apparent here, though it is implicit in most of the "The RDP of the Soul". The fifth feature is "western oppressive values", with an emphasis on the first word in the phrase. The logic of the argument throughout is that lying behind and beneath the need for an RDP of the soul is the damage inflicted historically, institutionally, and psychically by 'western' forms of knowledge and practice. This becomes even clearer in the next part of the "The RDP of the Soul". So though the "The RDP of the Soul" adopts the moral trajectory of Mbeki, it broadens the trajectory substantially, recognising and analysing the systemic dimensions of 'the moral'.

The second major part of "The RDP of the Soul" deals with "The Role of Religion", and is prefaced with another quotation from Mbeki's Nelson Mandela Lecture, the section in which Mbeki argues that not only do all human beings have a soul, "all human societies also have a soul".²⁵⁴ This quotation is followed by an analysis of the colonial misuse of religion and the emergence of liberating forms of religion in South Africa, the post-liberation relapse into institutional "religious apartheid" which refuses to collaborate across different faith traditions for transformation, the malaise in traditional institutional religion and the rise of agnosticism and fundamentalism, and the prophetic signs of a cross-sectoral commitment to progressive transformation of society.²⁵⁵

The preamble to this part of the document is a set of quotations from Mbeki's Nelson Mandela Lecture. It is worth quoting because it sets the scene for much of the rest of the argument of "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document.

²⁵² ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁵³ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁵⁴ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁵⁵ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

Human fulfillment consists of more than access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for our people . . .

As distinct from other species of the animal world, human beings also have spiritual needs. Thus all of us, and not merely the religious leaders, speak of the intangible element that is immanent in all human beings—the soul!

Acceptance of this proposition as a fact must necessarily mean that we have to accept the related assertion that consequently, all human societies also have a soul. Thabo Mbeki²⁵⁶

The argument in this set of quotations, which are true to Mbeki's more extended argument, is that the focus of the RDP, which committed the ANC government to "modern and effective services" for all our people, should not be our primary focus; there is a more urgent concern, namely the moral failure infecting our nation, and so while the government gets on with sorting out the economy, we the people with the aid of religion must get on with repairing our individual and corporate soul. As early as 1995, while Mbeki was Deputy President, he said that the liberation government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) had "established a unique national consensus on the need for prosperity, democracy, human development and the removal of poverty". "However", he goes on to say, "despite its almost biblical character, the RDP Base Document did not provide us with all the answers". This is because, he continues, "We have always known that its many many priorities and programmes need to be distilled into a series of realistic steps, guided by a long term vision and our resource constraints".²⁵⁷ The vision of prophetic religion, Mbeki seems to argue, is unrealistic, particularly in economic terms, and so 'Prophetic Theology' should not meddle in economic policy. However, the vision of moral religion, 'Church Theology', is adequate to our nation's needs for it is appropriately focused on the moral problem. Again, this part of the "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document seems to accept Mbeki's trajectory as its starting point, though it does go on to broaden it.

The first sub-section in this part of the Document on "The Colonial Misuse of Religion" focuses on the damage done by the imposition of colonial

²⁵⁶ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁵⁷ Mbeki, *A National Strategic Vision for South Africa: Address by Deputy President T.M. Mbeki, at the Development Planning Summit, Hosted by the Intergovernmental Forum, 27 November 1995*.

institutional religion on Africa and Africans. The colonial and missionary enterprise “coopted” us “into western civilisation and a corrupted version of the Gospel”, undermining “the essentials of spiritual humanity proclaimed by the great spiritual leaders of the past”, none of whom “were products of western civilisation”, “not Hindus, Confucius, Isaiah, Amos, the Buddha, Jesus, or Mohammed”.²⁵⁸ The anti-western argument is clear here, and so is a sixth distinctive feature. According to this analysis religion is in and of itself not bad for us. There is an uncorrupted version of “the Gospel”, with a capital ‘G’, and there are “essentials of spiritual humanity”, and there are “great spiritual leaders of the past”.

The next sub-section, on “Liberating Religion”, draws attention to more recent examples of life-giving religion from our own recent past. Among these are the ecumenical and inter-faith movements of the liberation struggle, Liberation Theology, and various declarations (like the 1991 inter-faith “Declaration of Religious Rights and Responsibilities”) and institutional formations (like the National Religious Leaders Forum). But, the sub-section concludes, little became of this legacy.²⁵⁹

The reasons for the failure of liberating religion are discussed in the next sub-section, under the heading “Relapse”. The continued colonial practice of “religious apartheid”, with a refusal, largely on the part of the dominant Christian majority, to embrace ecumenical and inter-faith collaboration is the first reason.²⁶⁰ A second reason for the failure of liberating religion is that “although religious institutions are aware of agreement on the principles of spiritual values and integrity for the whole human community, many are too busy running their inherited separate activities to work out united strategies of transformation”.²⁶¹ A third reason is the rampant prevalence of ‘Church Theology’, in which, “Many religious communities recuse themselves from involvement in the programmes of national, provincial or local government ‘because you cannot mix religion and politics’ (a totally un-godly anti-human colonial doctrine)”.²⁶² Along with some of the other distinctive features we have already identified in the Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm there are signs here of a seventh (closely related to the sixth). Leaning on the contribution of *The Kairos Document* this sub-section and the previous one on “Liberating Religion” recognise the reality of contending trajectories within a religious tradition. This is clearly articulated in the final analysis in

258 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

259 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

260 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

261 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

262 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

this sub-section, when the “The RDP of the Soul” argues that, “There is a clear contrast between religious leaders (at all levels) who wish to present a united front for the better progress of humanity, and those who see no further than keeping their local religions going”.²⁶³ “The RDP of the Soul” elaborates further, and in so doing adds an eighth distinctive feature: “Many pulpits refuse to explore the spiritual unity in religious diversity which is written into our Constitution”.²⁶⁴ This eighth element is the implicit claim, which will be made more explicit later in the “The RDP of the Soul”, that the Constitution should on occasion dictate to religion what directions it should take.²⁶⁵

The final reason, perhaps (because the logic of the argument is incomplete here), why liberating religion has made little impact in our new democracy, is that because of sectarian and institutional forms of religion, millions of people “have left religion”.²⁶⁶ The argument is development more fully in the next sub-section, “The Gap”. The crux of the argument here is that sectarian and institutional forms of religion have failed many so that, “A gap has been formed between a world needing a new spirit of transformation and the failure of religions to provide it”.²⁶⁷ Two other forms of ‘spirituality’ (though the “The RDP of the Soul” does not designate them as such) “have rushed in to take the gap”, namely agnosticism and right wing fundamentalism.²⁶⁸

This analysis leads into the penultimate sub-section of the second part of the Document under “The Role of Religion”, headed “Right Wing Fundamentalism”. Here the third distinctive feature of the Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm is extensively re-examined. “The fastest growing religion in the world including Africa today”, the “The RDP of the Soul” argues, “is right wing fundamentalism”.²⁶⁹ Right-wing fundamentalism is characterised as having its roots in anti-scientific, anti-intellectual, and Pentecostal tendencies. In terms of content it is characterised by superstition instead of faith, the narrowing of theology to biblical “proof-texts”, the salvation of the individual, the pursuit of health and wealth, a focus on life after death, and the desire for a sectarian end to the world.²⁷⁰ “The RDP of the Soul” makes it clear that fundamentalism

263 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

264 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

265 For a similar argument see Plaatjie, “Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading of the Bible: A Case of Luke 2:36–38,” in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Dube; Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

266 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

267 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

268 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

269 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

270 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

is found in all religions and that it breeds extremists in all religions.²⁷¹ The “The RDP of the Soul” devotes considerable space to this topic, concluding that, “Fundamentalism is a major problem preventing transformation”.²⁷²

The final sub-section under part two, on “The Role of Religion”, turns from right wing fundamentalism to the other end of the religious continuum, namely “Progressive Prophets”. This sub-section is worth quoting in its entirety, for it reiterates many of the features of religion already discussed and introduces a ninth distinctive feature, namely the significant commonalities that characterise prophetic religion across various religious traditions (including secular humanism). Just as other dimensions of the Document had used Mbeki’s arguments to buttress its logic, here the Document draws on another ANC leader, Albert Luthuli.

And throughout our society there are progressive people already enacting transformation. They are in all sectors, young and old, women and men, spiritual and secular, poor and rich, working as individuals or in institutions, seeking the transformation of society, citizens of the age whose dawn cannot be held back, promoting progressive movements in religion and politics, economics and academia, schools and colleges, unions and businesses, medicine and the media. Behind all the criticisms and tensions, across the board, people and communities are engaged in clear constructive commitment to human rights and social cohesion, to community renewal and spiritual adulthood from their living rooms and local communities to national and international bodies. In many places in the world, especially in the West, the issue of transforming humanity is not even on the agenda. In Africa, you can smell it coming like the rain after drought, or the warmth of the sun after winter.

“Somewhere ahead there beckons a civilisation which will take its place in God’s history with other great human syntheses: Chinese, Egyptian, Jewish, European. It will not necessarily be all black; but it will be African”.
Chief Albert Luthuli.²⁷³

Central to this analysis, and affirmed by the quotation from Albert Luthuli, is the notion of an emergent form of progressive religion arising from the soil of African *ubuntu* but encompassing the best of each and every religious and

²⁷¹ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁷² ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

²⁷³ ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

secular-ethical tradition. This is perhaps a tenth distinctive feature in the analysis of religion in the “The RDP of the Soul”, the flip-side of the argument about a damaging western legacy. If western imperialism is part of our problem, then the recognition and recovery of African indigenous knowledge and conceptual resources is part of our transformation. This becomes even clearer in the third part of “The RDP of the Soul”.

The third part of the “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document returns to the problems that “inhibit the progress from Liberation to Transformation”, and is headed “Analysing the Answers”. The preamble to this part notes that to the list of problems discussed under part one, part two has added another, namely “conservative religion”.²⁷⁴ But the focus of the third part is on the positive factors which are a resource for transformation, the problems notwithstanding. The first positive factor, which like each of the factors analysed in this part of the Document is given its own sub-section, is that “Oppressive Empires Collapse”, whether the empire of apartheid or the new empire of the US and its surrogates. And, the Document asserts, there are already signs that “the oppressive violence”, the politics of control, “the lust for wealth and power”, and “the grim grip of right wing fundamentalist heresy” of the US Empire are collapsing.²⁷⁵

The second positive factor is the heralding of “A New Economic System”, where the “The RDP of the Soul” finally lays an RDP of the economy to rest, without it being explicitly mentioned. The “recovery of soul in the secular world moves us onward”, the “The RDP of the Soul” argues somewhat obscurely, from thinking of economics “in terms of a conflict between earlier capitalist and socialist systems”.²⁷⁶ The “ongoing evolution of human society” and the “political wisdom which led us to liberation without ongoing violence, is directing our economic wisdom to discover a new role for capital in a new concept of socialism”.²⁷⁷ Socialism has not been abandoned, it is claimed, it has been reconceptualised. The new economic relationship between

the national democratic state and private capital is one of unity and struggle. On the one hand, the democratic state has to create an environment conducive for private investments from which investors can make reasonable returns, and through which employment and technological progress can be derived. On the other hand, through effective regulation, taxation and other means, the state seeks to ensure redistribution

274 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

275 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*. Would that this were true.

276 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

277 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

of income, to direct investments into areas which help national development, and broadly to ensure social responsibility.²⁷⁸

The argument here seems to be that “the recovery of soul”—an RDP of the soul—enables us to transcend not only the boundaries of different religious traditions but also the boundaries of different economic traditions. The work begun by Mbeki in legitimating the ANC government’s ideological shift to GEAR by invoking religion is now completed in this Policy Discussion Document. The lurking eleventh distinctive feature in this Document’s analysis of religion in the public realm is evident here: religion should enable us to move beyond economic contestation. Just when one imagines that the “The RDP of the Soul” will break with Mbeki’s rather narrow Church Theology-type conceptualisation of religion, the “The RDP of the Soul” baulks at the economic dimension, refusing to be truly prophetic.

The third positive factor in “Analysing the Answers” is “A New African Identity”, centred on Africa as the cradle of humankind. Having sent out humanity millennia ago “into innumerable racial, national, religious and economic groups”, Africa now summons humanity, the Document declares, “to come together again”, rediscovering its common core.²⁷⁹ This recall of humanity to its common core has been mirrored, so the “The RDP of the Soul” seems to argue, in the ANC’s vision of South Africa’s diversity being held together “within the overall sense of being African”.²⁸⁰ Religion too has played its role here, working with politics, education, sport, and entertainment to recognise a “new Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)... which is not western... but African”.²⁸¹

The fourth positive factor which enhances the capacity for transformation is “A Secular Spiritual Understanding”. The second distinctive feature of this Document’s analysis of public religion, already identified above, now becomes the focus. Not only is the “The RDP of the Soul” careful not to privilege any one religious tradition, it goes further in advocating for the sixth distinctive feature, namely a common substratum underlying all forms of progressive spirituality, called here “secular spirituality”.²⁸² This form of spirituality

278 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

279 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

280 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

281 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

282 In an occasional document circulated for discussion among colleagues (including myself), Mayson canvasses for “Liberating religion”. He notes the demise of any serious theology since *The Kairos Document* and he laments the failure of religious leaders in taking up Nelson Mandela’s initiative “to discover an inter-faith theology of transformation”.

“extends spiritual understanding from the religious world to the whole secular creation”.²⁸³ “Humanity”, the Document argues, “is reaching for a new reality”, rooted in “the deep primal human concept of ubuntu”, and “given a thousand different words in a thousand different languages”.²⁸⁴ Secular spirituality explicitly “rejects the individualistic priorities of western civilisation as anti-human”, embracing instead, and here the “The RDP of the Soul” quotes Mbeki again, “values and norms that have . . . resided amongst our people and which have held together our communities from ancient times up to the present. These values [are] contained in the world view known as ubuntu”.²⁸⁵ “This is the spiritual truth of all humanity”, the argument of the “The RDP of the Soul” asserts. “It is a basic understanding to be taken into all progressive religious, political, and economic institutions. Ubuntu rules”.²⁸⁶

The final factor in the third part of the Document is designated with the sub-heading “Unity of the Spirit is the RDP of the Soul”, and continues the argument of the previous sub-section, arguing that, “All religions agree on the great spiritual truths which drive humanity, and we need to accept this agreement as the launch pad for new development”. Moreover, these great truths and values “arise from ubuntu” and are put “into secular expression by ordinary people in the daily life of home, work and play”.²⁸⁷ The RDP of the soul, in sum, the “The RDP of the Soul” argues, is characterised by compassion, cooperation,

He then offers an incisive analysis of the tendency of institutionalised religion, whatever its form (including African Traditional Religion) to usurp the “prophets of peace and harmony, service and compassion” in whose memory they were established. Our current moment, Mayson argues, calls for “Secular Spirituality” (and the upper case is his): “We need to liberate religion into a new secular spirituality [lower case this time] which drives away superstition and fear, and empowers millions of agnostics and believers who are seeking a spirituality not wrapped in colonial religions. It means a new evangelism, a unity in diversity of people seeking values which change society, a new prophetic context which sees politics and economics as godly spheres”; Mayson, “Liberating Religion,” (Unpublished, 2005). Having engaged with Mayson on how he would locate the Bible within this analysis, he responded by saying that according to his understanding “the Bible is essentially about secular spirituality, not the religious spirituality usually propounded by the religious institutions”. See also Mayson, “Into the World Come of Age,” in *Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion* (eds. du Toit and Mayson; Pretoria: Unisa, 2006); Plaatjie, “Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading of the Bible: A Case of Luke 2:36–38.”

283 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

284 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

285 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

286 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

287 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

and commitment; they are “the fruit of secular spirituality, the heartbeat of ubuntu, . . . the essence of the RDP of the Soul”.²⁸⁸ In case the more traditionally religious might balk at this secular spirituality, the “The RDP of the Soul” concludes this third part of the Document by stating that: “None of this denies the positive role that religion can play: the value of sacraments, the message of theology, the empowering experience of communities of faith, the role of history, the proclamation of the prophets, the lives of the saints: all feed the spirituality of the human world, the secular reality in which the soul of humanity has its being”.²⁸⁹

The fourth and final part of “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document charts “The Way of Transformation”. Returning to the economic RDP for the last time, the “The RDP of the Soul” draws on the centrality of the “concept of struggle” in the original RDP Base Document. Though “The RDP of Soul” does not acknowledge that the core of the struggle discussed in the RDP document concerns the economy, it takes up the language of ‘the struggle’ to urge all South Africans to join the struggle, which in this case “demands a struggle to evolve a new society through compassion, cooperation and commitment, which includes an economy designed for people not for profit, and the release of spiritual values into secular life”.²⁹⁰ Again, the basic trajectory set by Mbeki (though invoked by Mandela) is maintained, though somewhat broadened. The opportunity to take up a prophetic political-economic trajectory along the lines of South African Black Theology or Contextual Theology is declined.

In the first sub-section of this final part, “A Site of Struggle”, the “The RDP of the Soul” returns to the seventh distinctive feature with respect to the analysis of religion in the public realm, namely that religion is itself “a site of struggle”. This was the case in the struggle against apartheid, the Document argues, and it continues to be the case in the struggle for a new society.²⁹¹ The incipient eighth distinctive feature mentioned briefly above now takes shape in the concluding part of this sub-section:

The ANC is not a religious organisation; it fully supports the Constitutional policy of freedom of religion; it has no policy of interference with those whose religious policies are not its own. But the ANC has a major responsibility to spell out the dangers when people promote organisations

288 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

289 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

290 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

291 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

which are opposed to the spiritual or material development of our people, whatever religious credentials they may claim. . . . The ANC is deeply involved in South Africa's struggle to renew and develop her soul.²⁹²

In the "The RDP of the Soul" the ANC reserves the right to address religion. But the Document acknowledges no place for progressive prophetic religion to talk back to the ANC and the state it governs on issues other than the moral. If we were to borrow the language and logic of the "The RDP of the Soul", we would argue that in this Document there is no role for "prophetic prophets", particularly those promoting progressive economic policy, to spell out the dangers to the ANC government when they promote economic policies which are opposed to the spiritual or material development of the South African people, whatever economic credentials the ANC may claim.

"The RDP of the Soul" Document concludes this final part with some discussion of "ANC programmes", arguing that in working for "South Africa's struggle to renew and develop her soul", the ANC is required "to devise policies and set out comprehensive programmes for secular transformation by spiritual values, through public education and commitment in the branches, the religious bodies, the media, in branches of government, in the structures of the ANC, and wherever people are learning to transform human community together".²⁹³ The Document envisages a role for itself in the ongoing work of the ANC, but it is not clear to what extent "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document has been taken up through ANC programmes, though the Document remains on the ANC's official website and traces of its presence can be detected in the "Resolutions" document of the ANC 52nd National Conference, and in the public speeches of Jacob Zuma. To the latter we now turn.

Zuma's Bible: A More Popular Religion

"You will see, Jacob Zuma knows the Bible much better than Thabo Mbeki". This was said to me as I sat and waited for my car in a central Pietermaritzburg car-wash several months before the 52nd National Conference of the African National Congress in December 2007. The person who spoke to me, who was

292 ANC, *The RDP of the Soul*.

293 Three other areas are discussed in this fourth and final part of the Document, including the issue of religious "Public holidays", "The Open Vote", and the formation of a "CRA [Commission for Religious Affairs] Pastoral Committee". There are also a number of "Questions for Discussion".

also waiting for his car, had noticed me working on a paper while I waited. Making conversation with me, he asked whether I was preparing for a speech. No, I said, I was actually correcting an academic paper I had written. I introduced myself, explaining that I lectured in Biblical Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He introduced himself as someone who also had an interest in theological issues, regularly writing booklets for his church, even though his tertiary training was in history and his formal work was in the department of education of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government. When he asked me what my paper was about I said that I was writing a paper on Thabo Mbeki's use of the Bible in the South African public realm. I explained that as a biblical scholar I had been intrigued to note that Thabo Mbeki had begun to use the Bible more and more in his public speeches, culminating in his speech at the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture in July 2006. My conversation partner became even more animated at this, stating that Mbeki was not really interested in the Bible, and besides, he said, "You will see, Jacob Zuma knows the Bible much better than Thabo Mbeki". Before I could pursue this comment, his car was completed and we separated. But his comment has led me from Mbeki to Zuma, as I watched the events at the ANC Polokwane National Conference unfold, with Jacob Zuma replacing Thabo Mbeki as President of the ANC.

Both the erudite classical religion of Thabo Mbeki and the ecumenical secular-spirituality of "The RDP of the Soul" have been relegated to the back benches since Polokwane. A more popular form of Church Theology has become the public religion of the ANC. Part of Jacob Zuma's ascension to power within the ANC has been his ability to be make a range of different sectors feel that he is being attentive to their concerns (even if he cannot deliver to them all).²⁹⁴ Following the ANC's Polokwane Congress, in the period between the 52nd Congress and Zuma's inauguration as President of South Africa, Zuma made a considerable effort to engage with South Africa's religious sectors.

Then and since, Jacob Zuma has represented himself as a religious man, but in ways which are notably different from his predecessor and the religious policy document of his party. Zuma is in many ways quite different from Mbeki, the classically literate humanist with a feel for the language of the King James Version of the Bible and a preference for the Bible's wisdom tradition, and Zuma's spirituality is also quite different from the ecumenical and secular spirituality advocated by the ANC's "The RDP of the Soul" Policy Discussion Document. Zuma is robustly Christian in his religious discourse, favouring the Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic forms of Christianity and their more modern translations of the Bible, not the highly textual form of Mbeki or the

294 See Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 59–65.

avant-garde secular-spirituality form of “The RDP of the Soul”. But there are also areas of overlap with each of these in Zuma’s deployment of religion, particularly in his scripted presentations. This section of the chapter will follow Zuma from Polokwane to the Presidency, analysing each of his major speeches in an attempt to ascertain how Zuma deployed religion in the public realm during this pivotal period in the ANC Alliance’s reestablishment of its power base.

Though Zuma’s more casual most comments on and appropriations of religion have been extensively taken up by the media, his more considered comments have not. For example, any claim by the ANC that Jacob Zuma is in any way ‘like Jesus’ has been vigorously contested in the media. An example is when he implicitly associated himself with Jesus when he claimed that the ANC breakaway political party Cope (Congress of the People) is like Jesus’ donkey. Referring explicitly to the biblical story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:1–8), Zuma went on to say, “The people were waiting for the Son of Man [Jesus/Zuma/ANC] who was on the donkey [Cope]. The donkey did not understand it, and thought the songs of praise were for him”.²⁹⁵ Such remarks, often made with overt humour, have led to a chorus of contributions, from supporters,²⁹⁶ opposition parties,²⁹⁷ cartoonists,²⁹⁸ churches,²⁹⁹ and ordinary South Africans of different persuasions. So the media have played a role in returning religion to the public realm, albeit without any in-depth analysis of Zuma’s more considered contributions. A case in point is Zuma’s visit to the Rhema Bible Church.³⁰⁰

This visit, which took place on the 15th March 2009, is particularly significant because a careful reading of what Zuma said indicates that he is more nuanced about religion than the media acknowledges. In this case he begins his address to what the “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document would consider a ‘fundamentalist’ church, with its roots in the ‘faith gospel’ or

295 du Plessis, “Cope Like Jesus’s Donkey—Zuma,” in *News* 24 (2008).

296 Tromp and Nqiyaza, “Crowd Raises Zuma to Status of a Deity,” *The Star*, 3 November 2008 2008.

297 DA, *Jacob Zuma, Jesus, and Robert Mugabe* (2008 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71619?oid=93081&sn=Detail>; IOL, “*Blasphemous to Compare Zuma with Jesus*” (2008 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/blasphemous-to-compare-zuma-with-jesus-1.427544#.VWwqBP4w9Ms>.

298 Zapiro, *Hark the Herald Angels Cringe* (Sunday Times, 1 June 2015 2008 [cited 21 December 2008]); available from <http://www.zapiro.com/cartoon/122767-081221st#.VWwoCv4w9Ms>.

299 IOL, “Church Slams Zuma Remark,” (2008).

300 SAPA, “Rhema Defends Zuma Visit,” in *Mail & Guardian Online* (Mail & Guardian, 2009).

‘gospel of prosperity’ movement associated with Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland,³⁰¹ by reminding the congregation that, “Our Constitution enshrines the freedom of religion, belief and opinion. It allows religious diversity in our multicultural society”.³⁰² Though Zuma’s focus in this speech is understandably on the Christian faith, and though he does continue his speech by saying that “[t]he ANC has its roots in the Christian faith”, he immediately adds that the ANC “celebrates and supports all beliefs in its broad membership and support base”. He justifies his Christian emphasis by saying that, “We recognise that while there is extensive religious diversity, the majority of South Africans are Christians”.³⁰³

He then shifts rather abruptly to the Bible, saying that one of his “favourite books in the Bible is the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament”. That he turns to the Bible is appropriate to his context, but that he refers to the archetypal text from liberation theology in this historically conservative (politically and theologically) prosperity-oriented church context is either bold or naive. He quotes from Exodus 3:

In Exodus 3, the Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey”.

In Exodus 5, Moses and Aaron went to the Pharaoh and said to him: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: “Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert”.³⁰⁴

With many members of the thoroughly Church Theology Rhema Bible Church probably squirming in their plush seats Zuma reminds them that, “The Exodus from Egypt has always symbolised the liberatory character of the church”. Zuma elaborates on this line of argument, saying that the story of “Moses and his mission as a man of God inspired many an oppressed people and made them

301 Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 48.

302 Zuma, *Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church Prayer Service* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3771>.

303 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

304 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

realise that indeed God is on the side of the poor and oppressed”.³⁰⁵ Zuma’s next move is to associate the ANC with Moses and his mission.

The call “Let My People Go” is not far removed from our organisation’s vision. It is not surprising that the phrase is the title of a biography of our illustrious ANC former President, Inkosi Albert Luthuli. When our leaders in the ANC and the Church said to successive apartheid regimes: “Let My People Go”, we knew that God would be on our side until our freedom was attained. Since its formation in 1912 the African National Congress understood this liberation mission of the Church and the word of God, and aligned itself with it.³⁰⁶

Zuma goes on to instruct them about history of the ANC’s relationship with the church, citing Nelson Mandela who “traces the relationship between the ANC and the church to the 1870s when the Ethiopian Church Movement was formed as a response to the rapid land dispossession from the 1800s. The African clergy sought to free themselves from the fetters of the missionaries by establishing African Independent Churches that came to be known as Ethiopian Churches”.³⁰⁷ The purpose of this theological history lesson becomes clear after Zuma has mentioned a number of examples “which illustrate that the historical association of the ANC and the church cannot be doubted”, when he states, “The ANC practically derived its moral vision from the church amongst other sources”.³⁰⁸

The “moral vision” of the church, which according to Zuma’s historical analysis includes a profoundly political dimension, not only explains the mission of the ANC but “also explains the key role played by the religious sector in the struggle for freedom in our country”.³⁰⁹ And it is because of this relationship between the ANC and the church that “the post-2009 election administration”, continues Zuma, “will work for a continued partnership with the faith-based sector to give practical meaning to the ANC’s moral vision, based on our country’s Constitution”. In sum, argues Zuma, “Our moral vision embodies the

305 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

306 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

307 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

308 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*. The speech sometimes uses upper-case for ‘Church’ and sometimes lower-case ‘church’; I have regularised the spelling. It is clear that Zuma is referring to ‘the church’ in general.

309 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

values of a just and caring society”.³¹⁰ In the remainder of his speech Zuma elaborates on ways in which the ANC needs “the support of the church and all faith-based organisations, so that together we can release our people from the slavery of poverty and its manifestations”.³¹¹

In general, Zuma says to the Rhema Bible Church, government “should open its doors to enable interaction with faith-based organisations on policy and implementation”. Specifically, there are “many programmes that require collaboration with faith-based organisations”.³¹² These include, health,³¹³ education, rural development, the fight against crime, and the creation of “decent jobs”. The first two, Zuma argues, are domains in which the church has a long history, and he commends Rhema Ministries for their support programmes for orphans and children living in the streets. The third, rural development, is important because churches “are the only institutions that are found in every corner of the country, even remote rural areas”, and are therefore key partners in the ANC’s proposed rural development initiative. The fourth programme, the “fight against crime is”, says Zuma, “everybody’s business”.³¹⁴ Significantly, Zuma says nothing more about the fifth programme, the creation of “decent jobs”.

The phrase, “decent work”, is derived from the work of the International Labour Organization, and is embedded within a careful socio-economic analysis.³¹⁵ Zuma invokes this phrase, but avoids its socio-economic implications here, for this is not the domain of religion. Instead, he continues his speech by calling for “a more active role of the church in strengthening and deepening democracy”, including popularising the Constitution and Bill of Rights.³¹⁶ Zuma is aware that this kind of call will cause some discomfort among his audience, for he goes on immediately to recognise that there will probably be “occasional friction between church and State”, especially concerning “[s]ome laws considered to be progressive and necessary by politicians and administrators”, including “the termination of pregnancy legislation” or “legislation for civil unions by people of the same sex”. “The solution” to such

³¹⁰ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹¹ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹² Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹³ And in a marked shift from Mbeki’s reluctance to engage with HIV, Zuma overtly mentions “especially HIV and AIDS”; Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹⁴ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹⁵ ILO, *Decent Work* (International Labour Organization, 1999 [cited 7 August 2015]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>).

³¹⁶ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

conflict, he continues, “is to have open dialogue and discussion”.³¹⁷ Zuma correctly recognises that such ‘moral’ matters will be of particular concern to this congregation. But he refuses to concede too much to this kind of Christianity, accepting that “[w]here no common ground is found, we will be able to disagree without being disagreeable”.³¹⁸

He concludes his speech by affirming that “[w]e believe in the power of prayer” and then urging “the church to pray for peaceful, free and fair elections and a smooth transition to the new administration after April 22”, as well as “for nation building”, working together with the ANC and government “to make all South Africans feel at home in their country, regardless of colour, language, gender or creed”.³¹⁹ “Working together”, he says, returning to where he began with an allusion to the Exodus biblical text, “we can definitely do more to make South Africa a land of milk and honey”.³²⁰

Like Mbeki, Zuma privileges the Christian faith, drawing on the Bible, but like “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, Zuma acknowledges the role of a plurality of religions in South Africa’s public realm. Rather surprisingly, given the politically conservative and theologically ‘fundamentalist’ stance of the Rhema Bible Church, Zuma is overt about the prophetic liberation tradition alongside which the ANC stands. But significantly he does not follow through on this trajectory, choosing to downplay the national priority for decent work, focussing instead on what might be construed as moral dilemmas such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Such is the dominance of the moral-religion Church Theology trajectory in South Africa since liberation that Zuma, like Mbeki and “The RDP of the Soul” Policy Discussion Document, cannot even imagine the religious sector talking back to the ANC or government about the morality of economic matters such as decent work. And while Zuma does not attempt to follow Mbeki’s de-nationalising deployment of religion, except implicitly, he is overt about the re-nationalising role of religion. Indeed, Zuma accepts the gains of Mbeki’s de-nationalising efforts, and so concentrates on using religion to consolidate South Africans around his (religious) leadership.

A few days after his scripted speech to the Rhema Bible Church, Zuma was back to his more spontaneous and robust orientation to religion. In a statement released by the ANC the South African public was informed that “ANC President Jacob Zuma held separate meetings with chiefs and organised

³¹⁷ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹⁸ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³¹⁹ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

³²⁰ Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Rhema Church*.

church leadership in Mafikeng today (Wednesday, 18 March 2009).³²¹ Significantly, perhaps, the ANC report emphasises and foregrounds the meeting with religious—in this case Christian—leaders, even though the meeting with traditional leaders took place first. So following the order of the ANC's statement, we read that

Led by Reverend Poet Tlhabanyane of the North West Forum of Religious Leaders, church leaders told Zuma they will ensure that between now and the election date every member of the church is encouraged to vote. Church leaders also committed themselves to help in constructing a caring society, and to fight against moral decay and all forms of abuse.³²²

To which Zuma responded, in the words of the statement, by telling the religious leaders “that the ANC was the only organisation that can claim that it was baptised when it was born”. The statement then goes on to quote Zuma, explaining why he would make such a claim: “There are three main sectors that were instrumental in the formation of the organisation—they were intellectuals, traditional leaders and religious leaders. Of the 11 former leaders of the ANC, a significant number of them, including presidents Mahabane, Makgatho and Luthuli were priests. As the ANC, we're the child of the church”.³²³ Linking the past with the present, the statement continues, Zuma commended the current commitment of the church leadership to the ANC, “saying it was consistent with the commitment made by their forbearers [sic] when the ANC was formed 97 years ago”. In his own words, and now directly invoking the Bible (Romans 8:31), Zuma proclaims that the support of church leaders “is an unequivocal biblical declaration that if God is for us, who can be against us”.³²⁴

Zuma then goes on, according to the report, to shift the focus from the ANC to society at large, arguing that “the show of unity by churches in the meeting around common issues was fundamental, as it had a potential to unite the society”.³²⁵ But this is not the emphasis of the report, understandably, given the priorities of the political moment, for the opening sentence of the statement reports that this diverse group of church leaders in the North West “have

321 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West* (2009 [cited 17 December 2009]); available from http://mydl.itweb.co.za/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1045109&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=195.

322 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

323 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

324 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

325 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

said they will encourage their communities to participate in the upcoming elections to ensure the victory of the African National Congress (ANC).³²⁶

In this more unscripted encounter we find Zuma somewhat playfully but not inappropriately claiming religious sanction for the political movement of which he is the president. He combines, rather skilfully, history and scripture to make his point, showing himself familiar with biblical imagery and biblical texts. But he also recognises the importance of the church more broadly; the “commitment” of the church to the ANC is significant, but so too is the potential of the churches, when united around common issues, to unite South African society. The statement also makes it clear what the central concerns of the church are (and should be?), namely, constructing a caring society, fighting against moral decay and all forms of abuse. Quite what is intended by “all forms of abuse” is not clear, but what is clear is the emphasis on the churches’ role in constructing a caring and moral society. Once again there is resonance here with both Mbeki and “The RDP of the Soul”, both in terms of the primary task of religion and in terms of the division of labour between the church and state.

The encounter between Zuma and the traditional leaders which took place earlier on the same day and which is reported on in detail, albeit secondarily, is instructive. What is significant about the meeting between the traditional leaders and Zuma, who was “welcomed by Kgosi Montshiwa of the Barolong to ululation by the assembled community”, is that it follows a similar format to that of the meeting with the church leaders.³²⁷ There is a similar invocation of the past, with Zuma arguing that the ANC “is an organisation of traditional leaders” since the very formation of the organisation in Bloemfontein in 1912;³²⁸ there is similar invocation of ‘religious’ values, in this case the specific value of “dignity”, which is key to “the common struggle of the ANC and traditional leaders” as they “reclaim the dignity taken over centuries by the colonial and apartheid regimes”;³²⁹ and there is a similar reminder of the task, in this case of traditional leaders, to support the ANC and “to fix this country”, which includes the “important role of holding the government accountable by criticizing us when we go wrong”.³³⁰

326 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

327 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*. These are the heirs of the Barolong among whom both Hamilton and Moffat preached and bran-dished Bibles in the early 1800s.

328 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

329 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

330 ANC, *ANC President Meets with Religious and Traditional Leaders in North West*.

Again, there are echoes here of Mbeki and “The RDP of the Soul”, specifically concerning the importance of African ‘dignity’ as a foundational, perhaps even religious, value. This said, there is no extended understanding of African (Traditional/Indigenous) Religion as a substantive religious resource in its own right, nor is there any recognition of the role of Christianity as an alliance partner of colonialism and apartheid in denigrating and destroying African dignity. In these relatively unscripted meetings, while clearly calling for an ongoing alliance with religion in which the political party plays the primary role, Zuma also allows for religion to have a public role in talking back to the party and state, though the parameters of this zone of contestation are not pushed much beyond the moral.

In a wide-ranging speech a week later (24 March 2009), at the KwaZulu-Natal Progressive Professional Forum, Zuma explains more fully his understanding of the domain of religion, focussing on the churches.

You would have seen us visiting various churches and meeting with religious groupings. We are doing this to deepen partnerships with interfaith forums to promote social education for moral regeneration, religious tolerance, social cohesion and development. We will be visiting more churches soon to cement this partnership with faith-based organisations.³³¹

The areas in which religion is expected to make a contribution in the public sphere are fairly clear here. This becomes even clearer when Zuma continues his speech by turning to economic transformation, addressing not the churches, but the “professionals and businesspeople” present, summoning them to play key roles “in various programmes of transforming our country”.³³² Earlier, in referring directly to the economy, and specifically to “the recent turmoil in world markets”, Zuma had stated that “the ANC will intervene to ensure that Government, together with labour, business and other sectors work together

331 Zuma, *Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at Kwazulu Natal Progressive Professional Forum* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3769>. In another speech, this time to the sports and musical legends, he again reports that he has met with religious leaders, among a list of sectors, including “business groups, professionals, women, youth, workers, Afrikaners and other minority communities, traditional leaders, religious leaders and various others”; Zuma, *Address by President of the ANC to Cultural Industries Sector Manifesto Endorsement Dinner, Gallagher Estates* (ANC, 2009 [cited 7 August 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3765>.

332 Zuma, *Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at Kwazulu Natal Progressive Professional Forum*.

to develop practical solutions”.³³³ Whether the religious sector belongs within these “other sectors” is not clear. If it does, it has a fairly clearly demarcated zone of contribution, namely, “social education for moral regeneration, religious tolerance, social cohesion and development”. It is in this terrain that the religious sector has an explicit contribution; similarly, with respect to the economic terrain it is the government and business sectors that have an explicit role. There is a clear division of labour and distinct spheres of influence.

Some weeks later (on the 12th of April 2009), ANC President Jacob Zuma accepts an invitation to the Easter service of the International Pentecost Church. That he accepts an invitation to a another Pentecostal church with a similar ideo-theological orientation to the Rhema Bible Church is itself significant, as it is somewhat at odds with the orientation of both Mbeki and the ANC’s “The RDP of the Soul” Document and therefore represents something of Zuma’s own religious orientation, and, perhaps, something of ANC strategy, post-Polokwane. Significantly, however, Zuma does not use this opportunity to give thanks for the formal withdrawal of corruption charges against him, which took place five days earlier on the 7th April 2009.³³⁴

Adroitly, Zuma begins by formally acknowledging “the Comforter”,³³⁵ the Holy Spirit, before going on to acknowledge the pastor, the leadership of the ANC, and the congregation.³³⁶ His personal engagement with the event is clear, for having recognised that this “is a special and very sacred weekend for thousands of believers in our country”, he goes on to add, more personally, “I feel extra privileged and blessed to be invited on my birthday to share this occasion with you”.³³⁷ His use of the phrase, “I feel . . . blessed”, demonstrates some familiarity with the discourse of this form of Christianity. However, he quickly shifts to a more inclusive and ecumenical-interfaith mode of discourse, saying,

333 Zuma, *Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma at Kwazulu Natal Progressive Professional Forum*.

334 Neither does he use the opportunity in his remarks on the 7th April to make any reference to God’s part in the formal withdrawal of charges; see Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma after the Formal Withdrawal of Charges by the Durban High Court* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3760>.

335 Though Zuma prefers more modern Evangelically oriented translations, in using this term he is drawing on the King James Version’s rendering of the term in John’s gospel (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

336 Zuma, *Address by ANC President Jacob Zuma to the Easter Service of the International Pentecost Church* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3759>.

337 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

In our country the Easter weekend is a solemn period as our people mark the weekend in various forms. It is the commemoration of the Passover for our Jewish compatriots, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ³³⁸ for the Christians and the Ratha-Yatra or Festival of Chariots by our Indian brothers and sisters to name a few.³³⁹

He goes further, following the inclusive trajectory of “The RDP of the Soul”, by invoking the Constitution. “This weekend”, he argues, “allows us to showcase our Constitution and the diversity it promotes”. He then elaborates:

The Constitution states that government may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on grounds including race, gender, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. Our Constitution also declares that everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.³⁴⁰

We are “a very free society”, Zuma continues, because of “the struggles of our people over decades”, and because “our new nation was founded on reconciliation and forgiveness in 1994”. “Nation building, unity and reconciliation”, he insists, “will continue to be the cornerstone of the new administration after elections”.³⁴¹ He then issues an explicitly religious re-nationalising call to those gathered, saying, “All South Africans must feel they are an important part of our country, because they all have a role to build our country. We have to build a united compassionate and caring nation. As people of God, we must be ruled by love and forgiveness, as well as unity and mutual respect”.³⁴² This call “[o]n this Easter Sunday”, he goes on to argue, now addressing his Christian congregation directly, “draw[s] inspiration” from Matthew 18:21–22, which he quotes: “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’”.³⁴³ Similarly, he continues, “We are also guided by Romans Chapter 12, Verse 9, which says: ‘Don’t just pretend

338 The phrase “the Lord Jesus Christ” is a standard formula in Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity.

339 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

340 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

341 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

342 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

343 Here again the New International Version is used.

to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other”³⁴⁴ Commenting on this text, and perhaps also imparting a lesson from his reaction to the formal withdrawal of charges against him five days earlier, Zuma says that, “Hate is an intense and all-consuming emotion. It takes over your whole being as you plot against your perceived enemy. On the other hand”, he continues “love and forgiveness are liberating emotions”. Turning, perhaps, away from the personal to the national, he concludes his commentary on these biblical texts by saying, “If we allow these positive emotions to govern our lives, and work in unity, the load will be lighter, and we will be able to build a caring society and a prosperous nation”.³⁴⁵

Like Mbeki before him, Zuma draws adroitly from the Bible, using the Bible to set up the remainder of his speech, which emphasises unity, both national unity and marital unity, the basic building-block of society (see below). Like “The RDP of the Soul”, Zuma points to the central values of the Constitution and a caring society. But like them he seems to separate the role of faith communities, that of building a unified and moral society, from the role of government, that of building the economy and democratic institutions, for he goes on in his speech to shift his focus from the faith community he is addressing to the ANC, reminding them of the progress “we”, the ANC has made “in tackling the apartheid legacy, building our economy and sustaining economic growth”.³⁴⁶ In addition, he assures them, “We have built democratic institutions that serve the interests and safeguard the rights of all South Africans”. Indeed, he continues, “Recent events have shown have shown the capacity of these institutions to effectively perform their Constitutional mandate, even in the face of heated political and legal disputes”.³⁴⁷ Finally, he concludes, “the ANC remains the only party that is able to mobilise a broad cross-section of society in the reconstruction and development of South Africa. We will continue to work with every sector and every group in society”.³⁴⁸

He then addresses “the couples who will be joined in holy matrimony today”, shifting from the institutions of the state to the institutions of the church, stating, “The institution of the family is the rock upon which nations

344 There is a shift in the Bible translation used here; this is from the New Living Translation, a modern colloquial paraphrase of the Bible.

345 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

346 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

347 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

348 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

are founded”.³⁴⁹ I quote here the concluding paragraphs of his speech in full, for they portray rather powerfully Zuma’s understanding of the relationship between church and state.

May God bless the unions and provide you with the love and strength to build strong families out of which we will strengthen our communities and our nation.

We are aware that we need to strengthen the family as an institution. Families will be under pressure due to challenges such as the looming job losses arising from the global economic meltdown. Our families are also under pressure due to societal ills such as alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence as well as crime that affects our society. We will have to prioritise programmes that will strengthen families and empower them to deal with such societal ills. We must also work with communities to eradicate the scourge of crime so that families can live in peace and harmony.

My message to the couples comes from the Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verses 4–7, which says: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”.³⁵⁰

Let us build happy, stable families and communities and a united, prosperous nation. Working together we can do more to build a united, caring and more prosperous nation.³⁵¹

Zuma envisages here a collaborative re-nationalising relationship between the Christian family and the state. The state ought to provide an enabling social environment for the family, and the church is expected to co-operate with the state in addressing “social ills”. But once again there is a clear difference in the focus of each; while the focus of the state is structural-economic relationships, the focus of the religious community is personal-moral relationships.

349 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

350 Again, there is a preference for the New International Version.

351 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma to the International Pentecost Church*.

On the same day Zuma also addressed the Muslim community in Mayfair, Johannesburg. Speaking at the Sultan Bahu Fete, Zuma commends the faith community for their fund-raising activities in support of “noble causes”, such as “raising funds for an orphanage”. Commending Muslim organisations more generally for their support of “the underprivileged and people in distress”, Zuma goes on to quote from the Qur’an:

The Holy Quran, Chapter 2, Verse 215, underscores the role of community work; “They ask you, O Muhammad, what they should spend in charity. Say: ‘Whatever you spend with a good heart, give it to parents, relatives, orphans, the helpless, and travellers in need. Whatever good you do, God is aware of it’”.³⁵²

As he has done with other faith communities, Zuma reminds his audience that “South Africa is a secular state where all citizens enjoy the right of worship and freedom of religion. We developed a Constitution together as South Africans, which recognised our diversity, and guarantees equality of all religions and culture”.³⁵³ As he has done with other faith communities, Zuma recognises and acknowledges the contribution of that faith community to the struggle against apartheid and towards a better society. He does this here at some length, recording the Muslim contribution from their earliest arrival in South Africa. However, the emphasis seems to shift during this recitation of the Muslim contribution to “a better society, free of racism and apartheid”.³⁵⁴ What begins with religion turns to culture: “We underline the fact that during the apartheid years, Muslims, like many other cultural groups in our country, rose to the call to unite in struggle against oppression and racism. In many parts of the country, Muslim communities stood side by side with Africans to oppose and fight the Group Areas Act and many other racist laws”.³⁵⁵

Incorrectly assuming that there are no Muslims who are ‘Africans’ (in post-apartheid’s racial nomenclature), Zuma goes on to reiterate the contribution of (Indian and Coloured) Muslims to nation building. When he turns to the forthcoming elections he outlines the five-fold priorities of “the ruling party”, and then goes on to call, not for a religious contribution but, for “a strong common

352 Zuma, *Speech by ANC President Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3757>.

353 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

354 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

355 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

national identity”.³⁵⁶ Muslim ‘ethnicity’ rather than Muslim ‘religion’ seems to be the issue here. “We need”, says Zuma,

to develop a common understanding of what image we want to project of our country. We must work hard to market our country and send out positive messages about South Africa to the world and to our own people, to be able to achieve the economic growth we desire, and create decent jobs. Every South African must be an ambassador of this country, regardless of colour, race or creed. We need to cover ground lost in the last few years, and undo the negativity that was becoming entrenched. We need to begin to change mindsets about South Africa inside the country and in the world. We have a good product to sell.³⁵⁷

He goes on to address the related, in his view, issue of post-election opposition in parliament, implying that his audience might lean towards opposition parties, perhaps because of their ethnicity, rather than towards the ANC. “It should be possible”, he argues, for those in opposition “to promote unity and patriotism”, “to have issues on which we can project a united voice to the world, and on which we can all put South Africa first”.³⁵⁸

This rather strange shift from religion to ethnicity indicates that Zuma’s grasp on religion outside of Christianity may be rather limited. This is borne out by Zuma’s speech a few days later to the India Christian Community in Phoenix, Durban on the 14th April 2009. Ignoring their Christianity, Zuma engages with their ethnicity. He commemorates the unity of Indians and Africans in the liberation struggle and calls for the joining of Indian and African hands in building the nation. However, there is no recognition at all of the role of religion in mobilising Indian involvement in the liberation struggle. The closest he gets to any engagement with religion is when he invokes the memory of “Mohandas Karachmand ‘Mahatma’ Ghandi”, though there is little recognition of what makes him a “religious figure” and no understanding of the role of religion in Ghandi’s anti-colonial and anti-racist political engagement.³⁵⁹

In both this speech to the Indian Christian community and in his earlier speech to the Muslim community Zuma is able to understand how their ethnicity enables participation in the liberation struggle, but he is unable to

356 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

357 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

358 Zuma, *Jacob Zuma at the Muslim Sultan Bahu Fete*.

359 Zuma, *Speech by ANC President Jacob Zuma to the Indian Christian Community* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3756>.

understand how their religion enables participation in the liberation struggle. Religion, for Zuma, belongs to another realm, that of the moral not the political-economic. And when he cites sacred texts, whether the more familiar Bible or the less familiar Qur'an, he chooses texts, like his predecessor, with an overtly moral message. While Mbeki favours the wisdom texts of the Old Testament and Zuma the didactic Pauline texts of the New Testament, in both cases the rhetorical form is that of a father addressing his son/s. In addressing those he wants to woo towards seeing him as their father-leader Zuma understands the role of ethnicity in contributing to public political consciousness; however, it seems he cannot understand the role of religion in contributing to anything other than the public moral consciousness.

In his final speech on the journey between Polokwane and the Presidency, on the occasion of his inauguration as the fourth president of the Republic of South Africa, Zuma assures the South African people that, "We seek a vibrant, dynamic partnership that is enriched by democratic debate that values diverse views and accommodates dissent". "Therefore", he continues, "we need to make real the fundamental right of all South Africans to freely express themselves, to protest, to organise, and to practice their faith".³⁶⁰ This is an interesting and suggestive set of clauses, though quite what their relationship to each other is is not that clear. But it may indicate that Zuma acknowledges a more prophetic role for religion in his presidency, including perhaps some engagement on the economic and/or political front.

Two subsequent but related speeches are also pertinent here. In his first "State of the Nation" address to parliament on the 3rd June 2009 he does not specifically refer to religion, but in the spirit of the secular-spirituality of "The RDP of the Soul" he calls upon members of parliament as follows: "Honourable Members, since 1994 we have sought to create a united cohesive society out of our fragmented past. We are called upon to continue this mission of promoting unity in diversity and to develop a shared value system, based on the spirit of community solidarity and a caring society".³⁶¹ But shortly before this, on the

360 Zuma, *Address by His Excellency Mr Jacob Zuma on the Occasion of His Inauguration as Fourth President of the Republic of South Africa* (2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=762>.

361 Zuma, *State of the Nation Address* (ANC, 2009 [cited 7 August 2015]); available from <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=310>. In a wide-ranging speech to an ANC rally on the 19th April 2009, Zuma made a similar call, echoing elements of the "RDP of the Soul": "We call on all South Africans of all faiths and convictions to join us in building a nation founded on the principle and practice of *ubuntu*. We must build a society in which each of us finds our humanity in the humanity of others; in which each of us bears responsibility for the dignity and well-being of each other"; Zuma, *Address*

24th May 2009, he is more overt, visiting yet another Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic-type church, the Grace Bible Church in Pimville, in order to thank congregants for the ANC election victory.³⁶² Accompanied by the Chairperson of the ANC in Gauteng, the Premier of Gauteng, and the Mayor of Johannesburg Metro Council, Zuma is clearly at home in this environment. He begins as follows:

I am honoured to be here with you today, to share in the fellowship, communion and the grace of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. We felt it important to visit today to show our deepest gratitude for all the support and the prayers we received during the campaign. We are taught in the scriptures to give thanks. Thessalonians Chapter 5 verse 18 states: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God."

We are naturally inspired to be in Soweto, one of the most visible symbols and sites of our struggle for freedom. Most importantly, we are pleased to share in the fellowship with congregants of the Grace Bible Church, a parish that is associated with progress and achievements. Our election campaign, inauguration and transition have been successful due to the fact that we blessed by the religious sector throughout the country. The ANC has its roots in the Christian church and has also always been closely linked to other faiths.³⁶³

He assures the congregation that the new administration will work hard, "so as not to disappoint you". Furthermore, he continues, "We want to keep the channels of communication open so that you can be able to reach the Presidency timeously to raise issues and alert us to any problems or development needs".³⁶⁴ Though the focus seems have shifted here from the congregation as religious people to the congregation as citizens, Zuma does return to religion again, when he discusses the formation of his Cabinet. "We have formed a Cabinet", he says, "that is truly representative of the demographics and geographical

by ANC President Cde Jacob Zuma to ANC Election Siyanqoba Rally, Coca-Cola Park and Johannesburg Stadiums (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3755>.

362 Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma, at the Service to Thank Congregants for the ANC Election Victory, Grace Bible Church (Pimville)* (ANC, 2009 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3747>.

363 Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma, Grace Bible Church*.

364 Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma, Grace Bible Church*.

spread of our population. We have priests and lay people, we have people from different faiths and religious beliefs, non-believers and believers. We have women and men, Africans, Whites, Coloureds and Indians”.³⁶⁵

Zuma seems to be making a number of points here (as elsewhere). First, the religious sector, particularly the Christian church and especially the neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic sectors of the church, are an important foundation force in the establishment of the ANC. Second, this sector continues to play a supportive role in sustaining the ANC in government. Third, the ANC recognises that this foundational and sustaining support requires some reciprocity, and so the ANC is open to the concerns of the religious sector, though these concerns are generally expected to cluster around the moral rather than the economic or political. Fourth, the religious sector must recognise, however, that the ANC includes, is constituted by, and serves a diverse array of other citizens as well as them. Finally, and this becomes clear as Zuma concludes his remarks to the congregation, the ANC expects the church to continue to support it, notwithstanding the church's concerns. “Please pray for the Cabinet as well as provincial executives and all spheres of government”, Zuma asks of them. “We cannot govern alone. We need a strong partnership with the faith based sector and all stakeholders. We derive our wisdom and strength from you, our people. We must therefore continue to work together to do more to build a better life for all”.³⁶⁶

Jacob Zuma has clearly brought popular religion back (post apartheid) into the public realm. In his unscripted and more personal engagement with religion, Zuma demonstrates a comfortable grasp of Evangelical Christianity, leaning in the direction of its more Pentecostal-Charismatic forms. Here he can be playful, spontaneous, and show something of his own personal spirituality. In his choice of religious sites he tends to favour Christian faith communities, preferring neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. Here, it would seem, is a constituency in which he not only feels comfortable, but which he considers politically important. But in his scripted engagements with religion he leans more in the direction of “The RDP of the Soul”, being sensitive to and drawing on ecumenical and interfaith perspectives. There are even hints of a more prophetic, liberation-type, trajectory.³⁶⁷ Overall, however, Zuma locates himself and his deployment of religion in the public realm within the broad band of Church Theology, a form of theology in which the primary terrain of reli-

365 Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma, Grace Bible Church*.

366 Zuma, *Remarks by ANC President Jacob Zuma, Grace Bible Church*.

367 Who is responsible for Zuma's scripts and what continuity there is with the Mbeki regime in terms of script-writing is an area for further research, as is Zuma's formal links with churches like the Rhema Bible Church.

gion is personal morality (and not the morality of the structural dimensions of society).

The 52nd National Conference of the African National Congress in December 2007 in Polokwane prompted a new era, it would seem, in the ANC's deployment of religion in the public realm. What was embryonic in Nelson Mandela's project, what began to be a resource in Thabo Mbeki's administration, and what was placed within a policy framework in "The RDP of the Soul" document, has taken on flesh in Jacob Zuma. He embodies religion, particularly neo-Pentecostal-Charismatic (perhaps even African Independent) Christianity. And in this respect he fits more firmly than his predecessors within the African religious landscape. For there are signs that under the leadership of Jacob Zuma the ANC would endeavour to coopt the vast swath of Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic African Christianity that pervades and cuts across the myriad of Christian churches of all kinds in South Africa.

While the ANC's struggle against apartheid drew forth and formed alliances with prophetic forms of Christianity, including individuals like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, sectors of the mainline churches,³⁶⁸ and ecumenical institutions like the South African Council of Churches (SACC),³⁶⁹ and while Nelson Mandela's and Thabo Mbeki's attempts to build a post-apartheid community and state, respectively, sought to coopt these prophetic forms of Christianity within the concept of "critical solidarity",³⁷⁰ Zuma has built an alliance with the broad spectrum of Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and their neo-Evangelical, neo-Pentecostal, neo-Charismatic offspring. Pointedly ignoring both the SACC and the National Religious Leader's Forum (NRLF) formed under the presidency of Nelson Mandela in 1997, the ANC under the leadership of Jacob Zuma "facilitated the formation" of the National Interfaith Leaders' Council (NILC), aligned with and under the leadership of the 'prosperity gospel' preacher and leader Ray McCauley.³⁷¹

Paul Gifford has written at length about alliances between these forms of African Christianity and African nation-states across the continent.³⁷² From

368 Cochrane, *Servants of Power*.

369 de Gruchy and de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 146–147, 170–171.

370 Mabuza, "Church-State Relations: An Exploration of the Notion of 'Critical Solidarity' in South Africa."

371 Kumalo, "Facts and Faction: The Development of Church and State Relations in Democratic South Africa from 1994–2012," *Journal of Church & State* 56, no. 4 (2014): 637–638. See also Mataboge, "Why ANC Dumped Council of Churches," in *Mail & Guardian* (M&G, 2009).

372 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998); Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*; Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009).



FIGURE 6 "Influence of the Religious Rights on the Presidency". Zapiro (aka Jonathan Shapiro), *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, 17th September 2009.

the side of the state, such forms of Christianity are attractive alliance partners, given their reluctance to engage with the state on structural matters, such as economic systems. The state from its side is content to cede the moral terrain to this religious sector, which would include the condition of the nation's soul, provided of course this was understood as and restricted to the collective personal morality of the nation.

Zuma's religious inclinations are captured rather succinctly in this image by South African cartoonist 'Zapiro', who draws Zuma surrounded by his "constitutional advisors", an assortment of theologically conservative pastors, one waving a Bible and a noose (representing, perhaps, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic church-leaders), one waving a snake (representing, perhaps, church-leaders of African Indigenous Churches), and one pouring petrol on to a stake prepared for burning "Faggots, abortionists, and similar vermin" (representing quite specifically the leader of the Rhema Bible Church referred to above, "Pastor Ray", a well-known 'faith gospel' or 'prosperity gospel' church-leader).³⁷³

373 See Zapiro, "Right Wing Religion," in *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg: Mail & Guardian, 2009).

From the side of these forms of African Christianity, though they are reluctant to enter the political arena and though they hardly have a political-economic agenda,³⁷⁴ such forms of religion readily embrace the African political elite, whether in Jerry Rawlings' Ghana,³⁷⁵ Yoweri Museveni's Uganda,³⁷⁶ Frederick Chiluba's Zambia,³⁷⁷ or the Kenya of Daniel arap Moi and his successors Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga.³⁷⁸ This is a "domesticated Christianity", which while taking on diverse roles, the one public role it does not conspicuously play is to provide a serious challenge to the economic and political realm of the state.³⁷⁹ This form of Christianity is focussed on the personal, not the structural; "it is not concerned with a renewed order or any 'new Jerusalem'".³⁸⁰

This has always been the problem of the Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic trajectory of African Christianity, with its individually-orientated and other-worldly ideo-theological perspective. Though the Bible is central to these forms of Christianity, practitioners overwhelm the detail of the Bible with two related layers of appropriation: a strong sense of the Bible's canonical shape and a personal-salvific ideo-theological interpretive framework. The same is the case with the 'newer' forms of African Christianity, the neo-Evangelical, neo-Pentecostal, neo-Charismatic forms. This trajectory veers off from its ideo-theological parent trajectory in at least one significant way. While the newer strains retain the individual emphasis of their parent, they substitute the other-worldly emphasis for a this-worldly emphasis. These 'neo' forms of African Christianity are thoroughly material in their focus on this life, though the spiritual remains the terrain in which they do battle for material well-being.

These 'newer' forms of African Christianity are finding footing across African countries (and within African churches of every kind), especially in contexts where the infrastructure of the African state has partially collapsed.³⁸¹ Influenced by elements of 'the faith gospel' and 'the prosperity gospel' from the

374 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 341.

375 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 57–111.

376 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 112–180.

377 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 181–245.

378 Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*.

379 Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 215.

380 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 339. Gifford's invocation of a 'new Jerusalem' is apposite, as we will see below.

381 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 345.

United States of America,³⁸² but rooted, it could be argued,³⁸³ in the substratum of African Indigenous Religion, these 'neo'-African Christianities claim the Bible as their undisputed and central source.³⁸⁴ Like their parent trajectory, these neo-Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic siblings, though purporting to be 'biblical' theologies, overwhelm both the literary and the socio-historical detail of the Bible with their personal-covenantal ideo-theological interpretive framework.

As Gifford demonstrates from the sermons of such churches, "[t]he Bible is understood to tell *my* story; it explains who I am"; furthermore, the Bible "is much more authoritative about me and my destiny than my present circumstances". These forms of Christianity, Gifford argues, "put great stress on not being influenced by what you see or feel around you. Ignore your situation; you must rather believe what the Bible says".³⁸⁵ And what the Bible says is that "Jesus has already won for Christians all the blessings of health and wealth; a Christian has only to claim what is his or hers by right".³⁸⁶ Significantly, though the 'newer' forms of African Christianity have shifted their desires from spiritual rewards in heaven to material success on earth, the terrain of struggle remains the spiritual. So such forms of Christianity seldom call on the state to provide material resources; instead, they claim, performatively,³⁸⁷ their material resources from God, through Jesus Christ, as proclaimed in the Bible.

In this Christianity, the Bible is understood as a record of covenants, promises, pledges, commitments between God and his chosen. Not just a record of covenants and commitments to others in the past. . . . The Bible is covenant and commitment to me, and to me now. In the words of [the Kenyan pastor] Wilfred Lai: "You can do what the Bible says you can do. You can be what the Bible say you can be".³⁸⁸

382 Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 48.

383 They both appropriate and demonise particular aspects of African Indigenous Religion; see Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 347; Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," in *Scriptural Politics: The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa* (ed. Kastfelt; London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 28.

384 Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 71.

385 Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 71.

386 Gifford, "The Bible as a Political Document in Africa," 19. The key biblical text here is Deuteronomy 28–30.

387 Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 174.

388 Gifford, *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya*, 174. See also Gifford, "A Contemporary Nigerian Reading of the Bible," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 152 (2015).

Because these forms of Christianity have “no blueprint for society in any explicitly political [or economic] sense”, there is a real danger that in our South African context the state will be allowed by this increasingly dominant form of Church Theology to pursue socio-economic policies of wealth extraction, whether by neo-colonial trans-global multinationals or neo-patrimonial local elites.³⁸⁹ While we should not minimise some of the contributions of these forms of African Christianity at “an indirect political level”,³⁹⁰ socially engaged biblical scholars must continue to heed, I would argue (and will argue more fully below and in the Epilogue that follows this chapter), Mosala’s warning: “unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present”.³⁹¹

My car-wash companion has proven to be an astute analyst; we have indeed entered a period after Polokwane when the Bible has become more evident in the public realm. And Gifford’s invocation of a ‘New Jerusalem’ is also apposite. The 52nd National Conference of the African National Congress in December 2007 in Polokwane ushered in more than a renewal of the alliance between the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (though the fractures have become more apparent in the years since Polokwane). Just as the visit of ANC President Gumede to the Soviet Union in 1927 prompted both a vision for a united front of African nationalists, communists, and workers in South Africa, so too it prompted him to use religious imagery to imagine this alliance: “I have seen the world to come, where it has already begun. I have been to the new Jerusalem”.³⁹² Polokwane has prompted a new era, it would seem, in the

389 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 4–6; Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 14–21 and 422–423. My use of ‘neo’ in ‘neo-colonial’ and my use of ‘neo’ in, for example, ‘neo-Pentecostal’ shares an ‘economic’ semantic feature; forms of harnessing economic resources are key to both.

390 Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, 342.

391 Norman Gottwald cited in Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

392 Gumede, *Speech of Jt Gumede, President of the ANC, at the International Congress against Imperialism* (ANC, 1927 [cited 1 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4544>. My invocation of Gumede is not idiosyncratic, for in a Discussion Document of the African National Congress National General Council in 2005 on the ANC’s experience of unity and diversity Gumede is explicitly mentioned; ANC, “Unity and Diversity in the ANC Overview of the ANC’s Experience,” in *Umrabulo* (vol. 32 of: ANC, 2005). He is also invoked in the period post-Polokwane, in an article by the ANC’s Chief Whip, Nathi Mthethwa, when Gumede is again used as an example of an ANC leader who promoted “the revolutionary alliance in South Africa”; Mthethwa, *The Revolutionary Alliance in South Africa: ANC, SACP and COSATU: Historical Reflections and Contemporary*

ANC's deployment of religion in the public realm, though the general trajectory remains constrained by the legacy of Mandela, Mbeki, and the "RDP of the Soul" Document. Religion is resolutely about re-nationalisation and so tacitly in support of the de-nationalisation economic project of the ruling Alliance.

In his Nelson Mandela Lecture, Thabo Mbeki also alluded to the New Jerusalem, drawing on William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming". Mbeki appeals to his audience not to allow a "monstrous beast" to be born from South Africa's New Jerusalem.³⁹³ For our country not to "fall apart", he argues, "we must in the first instance, never allow that the market should be the principal determinant of the nature of our society".³⁹⁴ Mbeki is right about the market, but he is wrong when he goes on to argue that it is the Church Theology trajectory within the Bible that is sufficient to direct the path of our nation. While it is true "that the Biblical injunction is surely correct, that 'Man cannot live by bread alone' [Matthew 4:4/Luke 4:4] and therefore that the mere pursuit of individual wealth can never satisfy the need immanent in all human beings to lead lives of happiness",³⁹⁵ it is also true that Jesus imagined a society in which each citizen would have their "daily bread" and would be free from unjust economic systems (Matthew 6:11). An RDP of the soul without an RDP of the economy is nothing more than Church Theology at its worst.

Ramaphosa's Bible: The Re-deployed Bible

What kind of difference would Cyril Ramaphosa make, many wondered, as he was elected by acclamation as Deputy President of the ANC at its 53rd National Conference in Mangaung in December 2012, in the year of the ANC's 100th anniversary? Having played a prominent role in the formation of the National Union of Mineworkers in the 1980s, and having led the ANC team in negotiations to end apartheid, Ramaphosa was Mandela's choice as his successor. But Thabo Mbeki prevailed and Ramaphosa was redeployed into the business sector, as part of an ANC project to build a Black capitalist class.³⁹⁶ And it was as a shareholder in the Lonmin mining company that Ramaphosa

Tasks of the African National Congress (ANC, 2008 [cited 10 February 2009]); available from <http://anc.org.za/caucus/docs/notes/2008/nt0515.html>.

393 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

394 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

395 Mbeki, *4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture*.

396 See Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 85–86.

became implicated in the Marikana massacre (16 August 2012).³⁹⁷ Only a few months later, in December 2012, Ramaphosa appears to have become ANC Deputy President of the ANC, recalled it would appear to revive the stature of the ANC in the wake of Zuma's tenure, and destined to succeed Jacob Zuma as the President of the ANC and South Africa.

Whether Ramaphosa will survive, politically, the Marikana Commission report is not clear.³⁹⁸ However, while it is far too early to speculate with any precision, there are already signs that he has taken up the ritual performance of religion laid down by his predecessors. Deputising for the President, Ramaphosa addressed the Pentecostal Holiness Church's centennial celebrations in Rustenberg on the 1st March 2013,³⁹⁹ remaining firmly within the rhetorical framework we have analysed.

Waving a New English Translation (NET) copy of the Bible, Ramaphosa began his address with a 'hallelujah', and then broke into a Christian chorus, "If you believe and I believe/ And we together pray/ The Holy Spirit must come down/ And Africa will be saved".⁴⁰⁰ Like Zuma, Ramaphosa clearly feels comfortable in a Pentecostal setting, and found it relatively easy to identify with their spirituality. Though it is not clear how his address was structured, given the press report, Ramaphosa appears to have followed a very similar pattern to his President. He assures the nearly 500 congregants that South Africa was a "Lord-fearing nation, a God-fearing country", and then uses the national outrage around violence against women and children to connect this general proclamation with a particular national concern, arguing that, "We also need to be the moral conscience of our country when it comes to respect for women and acting against rapists. We as Christians", said Ramaphosa, "need to become the moral conscience of our country". "This country", he continues, "requires leadership. It requires its consciousness to be raised" and, he asserts, "There is no better agent than Christians and the church to raise the morals, the moral consciousness of our nation".

Having established an emphasis on the moral, the undisputed domain of religion, Ramaphosa continues to connect morality in general with the particular concern of gender violence. Using Christian theological language, Ramaphosa goes on to make it clear that, "It falls on us as Christians . . . [to] say

397 Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis*, 83–88.

398 <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/marikana-report-1.pdf>.

399 Unfortunately the ANC's website does not include this speech, so I have had to rely on the *City Press* report, and other newspaper reports.

400 Du Plessis, "Church Must Combat Rape," *City Press*, 3 March 2013 2013. All citations are from this source; I have quoted the reporter's quotations of Ramaphosa's address.

this is a sin. This is a crime. Rape is a sin and it is a crime". He then attempts to link rape with corruption, when he says, "We are the ones as Christians who must stand up and say, corruption, we will never accept it, because it is a sin. It is a crime". Though the logic is not clear, Ramaphosa is rather adroitly constructing a semantic field in which 'rape', 'crime', 'corruption', and 'sin' cohere.

But Ramaphosa does not stop here. He uses the opportunity to urge the congregation to read the National Development Plan (NDP), and to come to know it as well as they know the Constitution. Like Mandela, Mbeki, and Zuma, Ramaphosa expects the church to participate in the public realm. "It is only when we play our part that we can say to President (Jacob) Zuma, you play your part as well, because we are playing our part. It is only then we can say to politicians, you are not doing things correctly[,] because we are playing our part". "I always say to people", said Ramaphosa, "'You do your job, I do mine'". Is Ramaphosa implying here that until the church does its job correctly, namely, dealing with the moral dimension, the church should not challenge the politicians to do their job correctly, namely, dealing with the economic terrain (which forms the focus of the NDP)?⁴⁰¹ Whether or not this is the import of what he said, it is clear that there is a separation of spheres, with the religious sector being (primarily) responsible for the moral and the state sector being (primarily) responsible for the economic.

In his address Ramaphosa follows the pattern of his predecessors by reiterating the closeness between the church and the ANC. He says that the church was in the ANC's DNA, and that the reason the party still had the position of Chaplain-General among its offices was to ensure that "the ANC stays close to God's light" and that it does everything "in accordance with what God prescribes". In order to make this point more personal, Ramaphosa, it is reported, joked with Kenneth Meshoe, the leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, who had spoken before him at this celebration, saying that he had been Meshoe's leader in the Student Christian Union at university, and that he, Ramaphosa, had taught him all he knew about delivering sermons and speeches. Clearly Ramaphosa has also learned something from Meshoe, comfortably embracing Meshoe's brand of Church Theology.

Like Zuma, Ramaphosa has little grasp of the religious complexities of South Africa, particularly where race and/or ethnicity are at play. A few days before his address to the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Ramaphosa gave an address to members of the Jewish community. This address is significant in that it demonstrates that Ramaphosa, like Zuma, is not familiar with the minority religions in South Africa. Zuma, we have seen, is most comfortable

401 NPC, "National Development Plan 2030: Our Future—Make It Work," (ed. Presidency, 2013).

with Christianity, though there are indications, increasingly so in the years following his inauguration as President of South Africa, that he is willing to engage publically with African Religion (as distinct from participating in overtly 'cultural' activities).⁴⁰²

Like Zuma, Ramaphosa focuses on the ethnic-racial identity of the Jewish community he is addressing rather than on their religion.⁴⁰³ In this address he concentrates on notions of "community", arguing that 'community' "is not defined by language or religion, by geographical proximity or nationality. It is not even defined by a shared identity or common ancestry". "Rather", he continues, "common to all communities is an essential and overriding concern with the interests, well-being and progress of all its members". "Community", he insists, "is about solidarity. It is about mutual respect and understanding. Community is, at its essence, about a shared and abiding concern with the condition of the most vulnerable and marginalised".⁴⁰⁴ What then follows is an extended argument for the Jewish 'community' to play their part in redressing "the iniquities and the inequalities of apartheid", by embracing the National Development Plan, which "perhaps clearly describes our connectedness as a people".⁴⁰⁵

Significantly, the bulk of this address consists of economic analysis. But rather than undermining my argument for a religiously ritualised separation of the moral and the economic spheres, Ramaphosa confirms my argument, for he does not deal with this community at all as a religious community. He addresses them as a white, educated, business sector. As such, their contribution is not limited to the moral; indeed, the moral does not get a mention. Because they are not primarily a religious community, in Ramaphosa's

402 My thanks to my colleague Dale Wallace for drawing my attention to this feature of Zuma's public engagement with religion. In an address to ANC members in the Eastern Cape in 2011, for example, Zuma invokes the ancestors, saying, "If you quarrel with the ANC, you have a problem because the ancestors turn their back on you"; see Skiti, "Fight ANC and Face the Wrath of the Ancestors: Zuma" (news24, [cited 10 August 2015]); available from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Politics/Fight-the-ANC-and-face-the-wrath-of-the-ancestors-Zuma-20111216-2>. Interestingly, I cannot find this address on the ANC website; indeed, a search for the term 'ancestors' yields no references at all on the website. It would seem that this address, even though it is to a formal structure within the ANC, is not as 'public' as other speeches.

403 Ramaphosa, *Address by Cyril Ramaphosa, ANC Deputy President to Members of the Jewish Community* (African National Congress, 2013 [cited 2 June 2015]); available from <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=10083>.

404 Ramaphosa, *Address by Cyril Ramaphosa to Members of the Jewish Community*.

405 Ramaphosa, *Address by Cyril Ramaphosa to Members of the Jewish Community*.

terms, he calls on them to make an economic contribution to “the collective”,⁴⁰⁶ within the framework of the National Development Plan. The separation of morality and economy remains intact.

Ramaphosa’s participation in the trajectory of his predecessors would not be that worrying were it not for the complicity of the churches. Since the mid-1990s the churches have withdrawn into what the *The Kairos Document* designated “Church Theology”. But whereas the characterisation in the 1980s was in terms of political engagement, Church Theology in our current context would have to be framed in economic terms. The systems that were the focus of *The Kairos Document* were primarily political systems, and so its “challenge to the churches” (as its sub-title indicates), was in forging a prophetic theology that would speak to this dimension of the struggle against apartheid. In this post-liberation period, thirty years later, the challenge would need to be about economic systems.

And while *The Kairos Document* no longer captures the ‘content’ of our current context, it does provide a ‘shape’ or process as a way forward. The second (1986) edition of *The Kairos Document* makes an important distinction, in a footnote, between “prophetic theology” and “people’s theology”:

It should also be noted that there is a subtle difference between prophetic theology and people’s theology. The Kairos Document itself, signed by theologians, ministers and other church workers, and addressed to all who bear the name Christian is a prophetic statement. But the process that led to the production of the document, the process of theological reflection and action in groups, the involvement of many different people in doing theology was an exercise in people’s theology. The document is therefore pointing out two things: that our present Kairos challenges Church leaders and other Christians to speak out prophetically and that our present Kairos is challenging all of us to do theology together reflecting upon our experiences in working for justice and peace in South Africa and thereby developing a better theological understanding of our Kairos. The method that was used to produce the Kairos Document shows that theology is not the preserve of professional theologians, ministers and priests. Ordinary Christians can participate in theological reflection and should be encouraged to do so. When this people’s theology is proclaimed to others to challenge and inspire them, it takes on the character of a prophetic theology.⁴⁰⁷

406 Ramaphosa, *Address by Cyril Ramaphosa to Members of the Jewish Community*.

407 Kairos, *The Kairos Document*, 34–35, note 15.

While those of us who stand within the trajectory of Christian prophetic theology should not simply repeat the analysis and theological output of the *Kairos Document*, we can usefully appropriate its process.⁴⁰⁸ This requires socially engaged biblical scholars and theologians once again locating themselves alongside the organised social movements of our time. As the Institute for Contextual Theology did in the 1980s,⁴⁰⁹ so today we must do similarly. Organised social movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo, and other kindred social movements, are summoning us to be among them. Speaking for itself, Abahlali has “learnt to draw a clear distinction between those forms of leftism that accept that everyone can think and which are willing to journey with the poor, and those forms of leftism that think only middle-class activists, usually academics or NGO people, can think and which demand that the poor obey them”.⁴¹⁰ Arguing that “liberation has been privatised”, Abahlali insists that “[t]he power of our organising comes when we reject this individualist understanding of liberation and accept collective responsibility for society”, for a person “cannot be complete in isolation from other people or without just and equal relations to other people in one’s surroundings”.⁴¹¹ Drawing on the legacy of Franz Fanon,⁴¹² Abahlali believes with Fanon that “the role of the university-trained intellectual”, black and white, is “to be inside the struggles of the people and to be inside the discussions inside the struggles of the people”, recognising “the shack intellectuals” and debating with them “as equals”.⁴¹³

In our moments of collaboration with them, the Ujamaa Centre (a project that facilitates a critical and contextual re-reading of the Bible within a liberation theological trajectory) has found that Abahlali are eager to do theology with us, living as they already do with their own ‘people’s theology’. Among

408 Each religion in South Africa will have to make its contribution to more ‘prophetic’ forms of engagement with the state. And each religion should make an effort to enter into inter-religious forms of ‘prophetic’ context-based collaboration; see for example Palombo, “Interfaith Praxis in South African Struggle for Liberation: Toward a Liberatio-Political Framework for Muslim-Christian Relations” (University of Johannesburg, 2014).

409 Nolan, “A Workers’ Theology,” in *The Threefold Cord: Theology, Work and Labour* (eds. Cochrane and West; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991); Nolan, “Work, the Bible, Workers, and Theologians: Elements of a Workers’ Theology,” *Semeia* 73 (1996); Cochrane, “Questioning Contextual Theology.”

410 Zikode, “Foreword,” in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali Basemjondolo* (ed. Gibson; Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), vi.

411 Zikode, “Foreword,” viii.

412 Zikode, “Foreword,” vi. See Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali Basemjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

413 See also their website: <http://www.abahlali.org/>

them are many Christians from many churches, but there is a paucity of prophetic theological resources. Those who have been schooled in the prophetic theological tradition of the struggle against apartheid must now redeploy our resources in the struggle for fullness of life, including socio-economic freedom. We already have rich resources in terms of theological method, including the 'people's theology' process of *The Kairos Document*.⁴¹⁴ What remains is to work with the embodied and "incipient"⁴¹⁵ theologies of organised social movements as they struggle, not any longer for the vote, but for the meaning of the vote.⁴¹⁶ For it is here, within this lived people's theology, that the Christian prophetic sector will find the theological resources with which to re-call the churches to 'repentance and conversion'⁴¹⁷ and to engage the state prophetically about the economic. If we are to resist and contest the ritualised invocations of the contemporary forms of public religion, including Bible waving politicians, we will have to relocate ourselves to where people's theology is already being done.

414 Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

415 Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*, 21–39.

416 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 157.

417 ICT, *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1989).

Epilogue: The Iconic Bible

to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible.¹

The Football Fans' Bible: Conjuring the Bible

At football (or soccer) games in South Africa fans can be seen 'conjuring' with both open and closed Bibles. Both are used to 'influence' the play, harnessing the spiritual power of the Bible in general and of specific biblical passages in particular to direct the outcome of the soccer game.

The Bible like football is African, and while some may remind soccer fans that football is a coloniser's game and/or the opium of the masses, and while some may remind Bible using Africans that the Bible is a coloniser's book and/or the opium of the masses, in both cases vast multitudes of South African Africans revere the Bible and soccer.

And while the Bible in South Africa may not participate to the same extent in the iconic terrain as it does in the Coptic Christianity of Egypt,² or as it does in West African forms of Christianity,³ or as it does in the Rain Shrines of Zimbabwe,⁴ the Bible is an object of power in various ways,⁵ and so is used in a range of rituals, including soccer rituals.

A recent advertisement by one of South Africa's large banks tries to harness the significance of soccer, declaring:

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- 1 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 153.
 - 2 Loubser, "Gathering Jewels: Biblical Hermeneutics in the Coptic Oorthodox Church of Egypt," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 10 (1997). For a range of related discussions on the 'iconic' with reference to sacred and classic literature see the essays in *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts & Contemporary Worlds* 6, 1–3 (2010).
 - 3 Adamo, "The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000).
 - 4 Mafu, "The Impact of the Bible on Traditional Rain-Making Institutions in Western Zimbabwe," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (eds. West and Dube; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).
 - 5 As I was doing the proofreading for this book we read of a Soweto factory worker who won the South African 'Lotto', winning twenty million rand. We are told that "she kept her ticket in her Bible"; <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/soweto-factory-worker-latest-sa-lotto-millionaire-20160510>.

In Africa we don't just play soccer, we live it.
 Our supporters aren't fans, they are fanatics.
 So when a goal is scored, we don't celebrate, we roar.
 Because here, the beautiful game is the African game,
 and it is played the African way.⁶

But, almost in response to this alliance between capital and soccer, the September National Imbizo declared: "Fuck Soccer! We want liberation".⁷

Soccer is opium for the oppressed—a drug that keeps them just where their oppressors would like them to be. It is Generations, Scandal, Days of Our Lives, The Bold and the Beautiful and Jika-Majika all in one. For 90 minutes or more, the black poor can forget about their condition and what they must do to change this situation.

Even long after a game is over they will go over the details of a pass a player should have made or a goal that could have been scored—anything to keep them talking and not thinking that blacks have lost everything. For a little while they can forget that come Monday morning those who have jobs will have to have money for taxi fare to work, where they will be treated like shit by their white bosses, be paid shit and return to their shacks with no water or a place to shit.

For as long as poor black people watch and talk about soccer and other sports (or go to church for that matter!), they have no time to think that their condition has been created by those with power over hundreds of years to keep them poor, hungry and working hard in call centres, farms and mines that make other people rich.

Though there are other interpretations of Marx's oft quoted maxim about religion and opium and the poor, which give the agency of the poor more recognition and respect,⁸ the question that this book concludes with, with a change of metaphor, is the implied question posed by Itumeleng Mosala. "The task now facing a black theology of liberation", Mosala argues, "is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the

6 Standard Bank advertisement, January 2013.

7 Manzi, "Fuck Soccer! We Want Liberation." This posting is no longer available online.

8 Rehmann, "Can Marx's Critique of Religion Be Freed from Its Fetters?," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 147 (2013).



FIGURE 7 Orlando Pirates football fan.

Bible”.⁹ How might we use the Bible in the South African post colony, a post colony of a special kind, to get the land and the economy back so that all South Africans are served by them?

Abahlali’s Bible: The Bible Among the Social Movements

In the South African film, *Son of Man*, a re-telling of the gospel story of Jesus set in post-liberation South Africa, Jesus addresses the crowd in a shack settlement. Standing on top of a VIP (Ventilated Improved Pit latrine) toilet, Jesus delivers this film’s version of Matthew’s ‘sermon on the mount’ (or part of it).¹⁰ While armed soldiers loiter in the background and a military helicopter hovers overhead, Jesus says (in isiXhosa), “My people, we have deliberately chosen to operate openly. Let us work together, because through collective dialogue we can penetrate the deafest of ears”. As the crowd roars its approval, he continues, saying, “It feels like we are defeated. We need to act like a movement to ensure that each of us is treated with dignity”. Again, the crowd roars its approval. Jesus continues, saying, “Let us unite. Solidarity! Unity!” The crowd

9 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 153. See also McKay, “Apartheid Resistance and Biblical Interpretation: From Christian Confession to Materialist Analysis,” *Politics and Religion* 8, no. 2 (2015).

10 Dornford-May, “Son of Man,” (2005).

embraces this call, breaking into collective song and dance, led by rhythmic drumming on a rubbish bin. This collective action draws more soldiers, and the order is given to disperse. Some of the crowd begins to move away, but one of the disciples (Peter) picks up a lump of concrete and advances on the soldiers. Jesus instructs him to drop the concrete, but makes it clear to the soldiers by his stance and stare that they not backing down. Glaring down at them from on top of the toilet this African Jesus stands with feet apart and arms flexed at his side. He then climbs down from the toilet, slowly. Once on the ground he pauses, confronting the soldiers with his dignity, before turning his back on them and joining the crowd. The hidden transcript of dignity has taken public form.

This is the turning point of this film's portrayal of Jesus, for following this confrontation Judas takes the video-taped evidence of the organising and mobilising activities of Jesus to the neo-colonial leaders who are plotting his death. And while there is much in this film that worries me,¹¹ the moment when Jesus reminds the people of their dignity rings true both to our South African context and the gospels. Jesus, both in this film and in portions of the gospel accounts, recognises that dignity resides both in the individual and in their collaborative action in the public realm. The 'sermon' material in Luke 12:22–31/Matthew 6:25–33 is a good example of this, calling for an internal ethic of the renewal of reciprocity.¹² This is not primary an external ethic, directed to those outside the community, but first and foremost an internal 'local' socio-economic ethic.¹³ The internal ethic is structured around the affirmation of dignity and solidarity among the marginalised; the external ethic is derived from and resourced by this internal ethic.

The place of dignity in our South African struggle, more than twenty years after political liberation, is clearly expressed in the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement. On the 19th March 2005 a group of black shack dwellers barricaded a major road in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Like so many other 'service delivery' protests, a sign of our times, this action was a protest against the failure of the state to deliver housing for the Kennedy Road shack dwellers. They had been promised that houses would be built for them on a nearby piece of land, enabling them to move from their shack settlement

11 West, "The *Son of Man* in South Africa?," in *Son of Man: An African Jesus Film* (eds. Walsh, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

12 West, "Contending for Dignity in the Bible and the Post-Apartheid South African Public Realm," in *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (eds. Claassens and Birch; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

13 Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 124–125.

crammed between the Clare Estate and the Bisasar rubbish dump.¹⁴ But under pressure from developers the promise of homes was broken, and the community was threatened with forced removal “to a place miles outside the city, far from work opportunities, schools, hospitals and the communities they had been a part of”.¹⁵ As bulldozers moved in to level “their ‘Promised Land’” (the biblical image is theirs),¹⁶ the community acted, barricading Umgeni Road with their bodies and burning tires. More than seven hundred shack dwellers participated in this protest action, and despite a vigorous police response, two days later, on the 21st March, Human Rights Day (and the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre), more than a thousand demonstrated, demanding that the police release those who had been arrested.

In his in-depth study of Abahlali baseMjondolo, Nigel Gibson argues that by March 2005 the shack dwellers had become a social movement “by virtue of their self-organisation and by developing their own relationships with other shack dwellers”. He continues:

The development of such horizontal links among the shack settlements suggested a new kind of movement in the making. By May 2005, the people from Kennedy Road and five other shack settlements, as well as residents from local municipal flats, organised a march of over 3,000 people. With banners expressing their collective will (“We want our land”) and homegrown political education (“The University of Kennedy Road”), the marchers presented a memorandum of ten demands that they had drawn up through a series of meetings and community discussions.¹⁷ Written by the shack and flat dwellers after careful discussion, this memorandum, which included the need for housing, jobs, sanitation, medical care, education and safety from police brutality and environmental toxins, became a people’s charter—one that sought to represent not only Durban’s 800,000 shack dwellers, but the poor across South Africa, where nearly three million households live in ‘informal’ housing.¹⁸

14 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali Basemjondolo* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 144.

15 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 144.

16 Gibson uses this phrase, and I have heard it used by a representative of Abahlali who has worked with the Ujamaa Centre on a common project; Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 146.

17 Gibson is here referring to Patel, “Cities without Citizens: A Perspective on the Struggle of Abahlali Basemjondolo, the Durban Shackdweller Movement,” in *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change* (ed. McMichael; New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

18 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 147–148.

As Gibson goes on to note, “Their demands were far from revolutionary; they were the demands of loyal citizens making reasonable requests, borne of their citizenship, for inclusion in the ‘new South Africa’: for housing, safety, health care and political representation”.¹⁹ And, he could have added, for respect and dignity. This addition is central to how Abahlali conceives their own struggle. What makes Abahlali distinctive among the many similar ‘service delivery’ protests that are a feature of our twenty year old democracy is their remarkable capacity for self reflection. They inhabit the praxis cycle, where action leads to reflection leads to action leads to reflection . . . , in an ongoing cycle. The praxis cycle is probably a part of many of the ‘service delivery’ protests,²⁰ but what Abahlali has offered to us all is a self-conscious and structured set of action-related-reflections. This becomes clear in any meeting with Abahlali representatives or in visiting their website.²¹

Speaking for themselves, as they prefer, their first president S’bu Zikode reflects on the need for shared leadership in the movement so that there is time for family and time for reflection on their “living politics.” This lived politics, he argues, is “a politics that was always based on thinking carefully about lives and struggles. We have to change ourselves before we can change the world and, without time to think, that change becomes difficult.”²² Zikode’s logic is clear; what they are struggling for is an internal ethic, rooted in their relationships to their families and to each other; and to retain this fundamental commitment and to orient their struggle around this core commitment they must make the time to reflect on their lived politics. ‘The struggle’ is both a struggle ‘against’ as well as a struggle ‘for’, with the latter being emphasised by Abahlali.

This is an important recognition in our contemporary South African context. Our ‘struggle’, and this became a technical, theory and theology laden term in the 1980s,²³ was ‘against’ apartheid. Since 1994 our struggle has been ‘for’, though what ought to follow this ‘for’ has been contested, particularly

19 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 148.

20 See Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013), 47–50, 95–96.

21 See <http://www.abahlali.org>, especially their ‘University of Abahlali baseMjondolo’ page. Much of the material that Gibson uses can be found here in its original form. See also Lindela, Mavuso, Ngema, Nsibande, Sibisi, Zikode, Gibson, Harley, and Pithouse, *Living Learning* (Pietermaritzburg: Abahlali BaseMjondolo, Rural Network, and Church Land Programme, 2009).

22 Cited in Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 154–155.

23 Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988); Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*.

in economic terms. Abahlali fills this 'for' with both content and process. For Abahlali the struggle 'for' is more than a struggle for the vote; it is a struggle for the meaning of the vote.²⁴ "For them," says Gibson, "democracy was not about an election every five years, but about day-to-day life that included reciprocity, caring and the inclusion of those who had been systematically excluded and told they were too stupid to understand".²⁵ In the words of Zikode, "Our struggle is for moral questions, as compared to the political questions as such. It is more about justice. Is it good for shack dwellers to live in mud like pigs, as they are living?," he asks by way of illustration. "Why do I live in a cardboard house if there are people who are able to live in a decent house? So it is a moral question".²⁶ Rejecting the Church Theology trajectory, Zikode insists that the systemic economic terrain is the moral terrain. It is for this reason that Abahlali has consistently refuted the discourse of 'service delivery'; "they insist instead that their demands are about 'being human'"; indeed, in the words of Zikode, "the struggle is the human being".²⁷ In Gibson's language, which resonates with Horsley's analysis of the Q source of the biblical gospels, "Abahlalism is a culture of sharing that is rooted in the ideas of community and reciprocity found in the long struggle against apartheid".²⁸

It is not surprising, therefore, that notions of 'dignity' have assumed such a central place in the discourse of Abahlali. "We fought, died and voted for this government," says Zikode, "so that we could be free and have decent lives".²⁹ One of the major goals of Abahlali, argues Gibson, building on Zikode's analysis, "is a kind of moral revolution, the creation of a society where the poor will be treated as human being with minds of their own". As Zikode puts it, "We are poor in life, not in mind".³⁰

Yet, as Gibson goes on to note, Abahlali is regularly reminded "that poor people in post-apartheid South Africa are not valued as much as others, and while Abahlali has successfully forced itself on to the agendas of government institutions and 'civil society', there is a constant struggle not only to keep these spaces open but through their inclusion to transform them".³¹ The dignity of the poor, as human beings, is constitutive of the kind of South Africa

24 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 157.

25 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 156–157.

26 Cited in Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 157.

27 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 157.

28 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 158.

29 Cited in Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 158.

30 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 158.

31 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 158.

we have struggled for, both in terms of the goals of our democracy and the processes of our democracy.

In his insightful study of the art of resistance to domination, James Scott also allocates an important role to human dignity. Indeed, Scott admits that he privileges “the issues of dignity and autonomy, which have typically been seen as secondary to material exploitation”.³² No matter how severe the domination, and Scott focuses on extreme forms of domination, dignity always demands a response to domination. In cases of intense and sustained surveillance by the forces of domination, dignity’s expression finds its place in the hidden transcript, a discourse “of dignity, of negation, and of justice” that is articulated and elaborated in those social sites that the marginalised are able to forge and secure in the face of surveillance.³³ Like Abahlali, Scott recognises that the poor are not poor in mind. Central to his analysis is the recognition that subordinate classes “are *less* constrained at the level of thought and ideology, since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety, and *more* constrained at the level of political action and struggle, where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available to them”.³⁴ What political (and legal) liberation has brought to South Africa is the political (and legal) space for the hidden transcript to enter the public realm. And Abahlali has embraced this space, giving fulsome account of dignity’s revolt to the state’s “systemic neglect”.³⁵

John Holloway, like Scott and Abahlali, locates dignity at the heart of social movements of the marginalised. In the Zapatista movement in Mexico he finds evidence of the centrality of dignity. In an article posted on the Abahlali website Holloway cites as an example a 1994 letter from the ruling body of the Zapatistas, the *Comite Clandestino Revolucionario Indigena* (CCRI), addressed to another indigenous organisation, the *Consejo 500 Anos de Resistencia Indigena*:

Then that suffering that united us made us speak, and we recognised that in our words there was truth, we knew that not only pain and suffering lived in our tongue, we recognised that there is hope still in our hearts. We spoke with ourselves, we looked inside ourselves and we looked at our

32 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), xi.

33 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 114.

34 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 91.

35 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 423.

history: we saw our most ancient fathers suffering and struggling, we saw our grandfathers struggling, we saw our fathers with fury in their hands, we saw that not everything had been taken away from us, that we had the most valuable, that which made us live, that which made our step rise above plants and animals, that which made the stone be beneath our feet, and we saw, brothers, that all that we had was DIGNITY, and we saw that great was the shame of having forgotten it, and we saw that DIGNITY was good for men to be men again, and dignity returned to live in our hearts, and we were new again, and the dead, our dead, saw that we were new again and they called us again, to dignity, to struggle.³⁶

Holloway goes on to extract this movement's understanding of dignity from their struggle and to begin to map a political discourse that has dignity as and at its core. Beginning with the self-evident assertion that dignity is "the refusal to accept humiliation and dehumanisation", he interrogates both the 'is' and the 'is not' of dignity.³⁷

Dignity, understood as a category of struggle, is a tension which points beyond itself. The assertion of dignity implies the present negation of dignity. Dignity, then, is the struggle against the denial of dignity, the struggle for the realisation of dignity. Dignity is and is not: it is the struggle against its own negation. If dignity were simply the assertion of something that already is, then it would be an absolutely flabby concept, an empty complacency. To simply assert human dignity as a principle (as in 'all humans have dignity', or 'all humans have a right to dignity') would be either so general as to be meaningless or, worse, so general as to obscure the fact that existing society is based on the negation of dignity. Similarly, if dignity were simply the assertion of something that is not, then it would be an empty daydream or a religious wish. The concept of dignity only gains force if it is understood in its double dimension, as the struggle against its own denial.³⁸

36 Holloway, *Dignity's Revolt* (libcom.org, 1998 [cited 23 June 2015]); available from <http://libcom.org/library/dignitys-revolt-john-holloway>; Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (eds. Holloway and Peláez; London: Pluto, 1998). I have chosen to cite this article in the form in which it is represented on the Abahlali website, as part of the 'University of Abahlali baseMjondolo'.

37 Holloway, *Dignity's Revolt*.

38 Holloway, *Dignity's Revolt*.

Profoundly and succinctly, as Holloway puts it: “Dignity is the cry of ‘here we are!’”³⁹ Holloway goes on to pursue both the moral and political dimensions of this assertion.

Dignity is an assault on the separation of morality and politics, and of the private and the public. Dignity cuts across those boundaries, asserts the unity of what has been sundered. The assertion of dignity is neither a moral nor a political claim: it is rather an attack on the separation of politics and morality that allows formally democratic regimes all over the world to co-exist with growing levels of poverty and social marginalisation. It is the ‘here we are!’ not just of the marginalised, but of the horror felt by all of us in the face of mass impoverishment and starvation. It is the ‘here we are!’ not just of the growing numbers shut away in prisons, hospitals and homes, but also of the shame and disgust of all of us who, by living, participate in the bricking up of people in those prisons, hospitals and homes. Dignity is an assault on the conventional definition of politics, but equally on the acceptance of that definition in the instrumental conception of revolutionary politics which has for so long subordinated the personal to the political, with such disastrous results.⁴⁰

Dignity encapsulates, says Holloway, “in one word the rejection of the separation of the personal and the political,” and the revolt of dignity “derives its strength from the uniting of dignities.” “Dignity resonates. As it vibrates, it sets off vibrations in other dignities, an unstructured, possibly discordant resonance”.⁴¹

Reading through the diverse genres of discourse on the Abahlali website one finds similar sentiments, organically related to their own particular struggle. For example, Abahlali leader Lindela Figlan offers a detailed reflection on the contours of dignity from their perspective.⁴² He begins by dealing with what dignity is not, saying, “The meaning of dignity is often misunderstood.

39 Holloway, *Dignity's Revolt*.

40 Holloway, *Dignity's Revolt*.

41 Scott uses a similar image in analysing how the marginalised construct their own discourse among themselves, describing how the first articulation by a member of the group has the potential to set in motion a “crystallization” whereby the other members of the group recognise “close relatives” of their own trauma, connecting them to a “single power grid”; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 223–224.

42 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity,” in *University of Abahlali* (Durban: Abahlali, 2012). The extensive citation here is deliberate, providing the internal, emic, logic of Abahlali’s conceptualisation of dignity.

Many people only think of dignity in relation to the economic status of those who are better off. This is understood to mean that a person with no money is taken as a person whose life and voice does not count and is therefore a person with no dignity. It is also understood that a person with money does count and is therefore a person with dignity. But no amount of money can buy dignity.” While money may buy many things, Figlan continues, “money does not buy dignity because to be a person with dignity you must recognize the dignity of others. No person is a complete person on their own, that is without others. In isiZulu we say ‘umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu’ (‘a person is a person because of other people’). In sum, “There is dignity in respecting the humanity of others and in being respected back”.⁴³

Figlan then turns specifically to the conditions that mitigate against dignity. “As poor people we do not live in dignified conditions. In fact when it rains we live like pigs in the mud. Our shacks are always burning. We do not have toilets. We are disrespected by politicians and, when we have work, we are disrespected at work. Security guards and domestic workers are often treated as if we are not fully human”.⁴⁴ Significantly, Figlan singles out people like us, scholars, as another sector that disrespects the poor. “Sometimes,” he says, “we are also disrespected by NGOs, academics and other people that think that they have a right to lead the struggles of the poor and who get very angry when we explain that for us solidarity must be based on talking to us and not for us and thinking and deciding with us and not for us”.⁴⁵

Over against this disrespect of the dignity of the poor, Figlan insists on the agency of the poor: “But poor as we are we achieve our own dignity”. He then goes on to enumerate the variety of sites in which dignity is achieved, saying that, “Some people achieve dignity in their churches. Some achieve dignity through culture, in something like a choir”. What is common to their various forms of the forging of dignity is that “we achieve dignity in the togetherness of our struggle. Our struggle is a space of dignity. Here we can express our suffering, we can think together and we can support each other”.⁴⁶

Reminding his listeners that he is speaking from a post-liberation context, Figlan says, “The rights that we have on paper were always refused in reality. This included our rights as citizens, our rights to the cities and our rights to respect and dignity”. Locating dignity at the nexus of this refusal, Figlan goes on to say, “Whenever we asked for our rights to be respected, for our

43 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity.”

44 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity.”

45 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity.”

46 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity.”

humanity to be recognized, we were presented as troublemakers, as people that were being used by others, or as criminals". Furthermore, Figlan continues, "Our request to participate in the discussions about our own lives was taken as a threat".⁴⁷

Figlan makes the important point that, "It is important that everyone understands that in this regard civil society and the left was often no different to the state". But over against the state, civil society, and the left, he continues, "Abahlali has been organizing and mobilizing to build the power of the poor from below".⁴⁸ Key to Figlan's argument here is the recognition that he is not referring here to Abahlali organising others. "We do not organise people", he says. "We organise ourselves".⁴⁹

Figlan then goes on to address the position of Abahlali with respect to politics. "We do not support any political parties or vote in elections", he says. The reason is twofold, first, "Politicians are always using the people's suffering and struggles as ladders to build their own power". And second, "We have therefore decided that we will not keep on giving our power away. We build our own power in our communities and encourage people to also build their own power where they work, study and pray. Where possible we govern our own communities ourselves".⁵⁰

The core problem, argues, Figlan, is that, "We have learnt that this order is one that cannot respect our humanity. In fact this order is based on our exploitation and exclusion. This order is designed to oppress us. Therefore we have understood that . . . it is good to be out of order. We are not loyal to this order".⁵¹ But this turn 'from' entails a turn 'to', as Figlan goes on to clarify. "We are loyal to our human dignity and to the human dignity of others and when that requires us to be out of order we are prepared to be out of order".⁵² Human dignity is the fulcrum of the movement's identity.

By identifying the agency of 'the organised poor' Figlan reminds liberation theologians of the notion of the "the epistemological privilege of the poor",⁵³ albeit in a post-liberation context. Though not engaging with this trajectory

47 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

48 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

49 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

50 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

51 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

52 Figlan, "The Politic of Human Dignity."

53 For a fuller discussion see Frostin, "The Hermeneutics of the Poor: The Epistemological 'Break' in Third World Theologies," *Studia Theologica* 39 (1985); Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988).

explicitly, Figlan goes on to enunciate clearly what this notion implies. “As repression gets worse”, Figlan says, “solidarity becomes more and more important”.⁵⁴ But, as indicated, he is clear that respect for Abahlali’s autonomy is vital to any meaningful solidarity. S’bu Zikode reiterates this stance on solidarity, placing dignity at the centre of their call for solidarity, saying, “The dignity of the poor is the starting point of our politic and it must also be the starting point of any living solidarity with our struggles. . . . Talk with and not for us. Think with and not for us. Plan with us and not for us”.⁵⁵

Dignity is agitive; dignity is more a verb than a noun. In the words of a joint statement by Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Rural Network, and the Unemployed People’s Movement, “Dignity is the road and it is the destination”.⁵⁶

The People’s Bible: Getting the Cattle Back

I have quoted Abahlali at length because they represent a call to socially engaged biblical scholars and theologians to enter into solidarity with them and to do theology with them. The Revised Second Edition (1986) of *The Kairos Document* prepares the way for us, making a distinction between “people’s theology” and “prophetic theology”. It is worth reiterating the quotation:

It should also be noted that there is a subtle difference between prophetic theology and people’s theology. The Kairos Document itself, signed by theologians, ministers and other church workers, and addressed to all who bear the name Christian is a prophetic statement. But the process that led to the production of the document, the process of theological reflection and action in groups, the involvement of many different people in doing theology was an exercise in people’s theology. The document is therefore pointing out two things: that our present Kairos challenges Church leaders and other Christians to speak out prophetically and that our present Kairos is challenging all of us to do theology together reflecting upon our experiences in working for justice and peace in South Africa and thereby developing a better theological understanding of our Kairos. The method that was used to produce the Kairos Document shows that theology is not the preserve of professional theologians, ministers and priests. Ordinary Christians can participate in theological reflection and

54 Figlan, “The Politic of Human Dignity.”

55 <http://abahlali.org/node/9753>.

56 <http://abahlali.org/node/9478>.

should be encouraged to do so. When this people's theology is proclaimed to others to challenge and inspire them, it takes on the character of a prophetic theology.⁵⁷

There can be no prophetic theology without there first being a people's theology, according to *The Kairos Document*. This is an important and timely reminder as some are attempting to revive 'kairos theology' in South Africa,⁵⁸ but without organic links to people's movements. A prophetic theological praxis that was rooted in people's theology is a distinctive feature of the strand of South African theology that came to be called 'Contextual Theology', and *The Kairos Document* is perhaps the best example of this praxis.⁵⁹ Sadly, however, this legacy has been neglected since our political liberation. But as Abahlali reminds us, the need has not diminished, it simply has a different face. And the resources remain. The Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) and the work of Albert Nolan have been instrumental in both theorising and facilitating this people's theology-prophetic theology process of doing theology.⁶⁰ So there is a guiding methodology for doing theology 'with' social movements within the kind of solidarity envisaged by Abahlali, if we are prepared to heed the call. And the 'raw material' is already there; people's theology is already present in the dignity discourse of Abahlali.

If we return to the inaugural protests that gave birth to Abahlali baseMjondolo, people's theology was present. In welcoming the fourteen who had been arrested by the police and held for ten days, "Zikode, together with Nonhlanhla

57 Kairos, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 34–35, note 15; Leonard ed., *The Kairos Documents* (Pietermaritzburg: Ujamaa Centre, 2011), 63, note 15.

58 See the "Kairos Southern Africa" initiative: <http://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/>.

59 West, "Liberation Hermeneutics after Liberation in South Africa," in *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation* (eds. Botta and Andinach; *Semeia Studies*; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); West, "The Legacy of Liberation Theologies in South Africa, with an Emphasis on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Studia historiae ecclesiasticae* xxxvi, no. July (2010).

60 Nolan, "Kairos Theology," in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (eds. de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio; Cape Town: David Philip, 1994); Nolan, "Work, the Bible, Workers, and Theologians: Elements of a Workers' Theology," *Semeia* 73(1996); Cochrane, "Questioning Contextual Theology," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (eds. Speckman and Kaufmann; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001). For similar reflections and resources from another Southern African context see Gunda, *On the Public Role of the Bible in Zimbabwe* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015).

Mzombe and other community activists, organised a welcome home party for the fourteen, at which Zikode held the crowd rapt with the following affirmation of their actions. ‘The first Nelson Mandela’, he explained, ‘was Jesus Christ. The second was Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The third Nelson Mandela are the poor people of the world’.⁶¹ Reflecting on this people’s theology, Nigel Gibson offers a further (though non-theological) articulation, saying:

The resonance was clear. The poor weren’t Christ, but Christ was the first Mandela, the first liberator who articulated a new heaven and a new earth. Mandela is Christ reborn, grounding liberation firmly on South African soil, his long imprisonment during apartheid a metaphor for the nation, just as his release is identified with the birth of a new South Africa. Yet, the failure of the historical Mandela to liberate South Africa demanded the birth of a new Mandela: the poor themselves. After many promises, all of them broken, they saw through the rhetoric of the local authorities. Enough was enough—*sekwanele, sekwanele!*—truth emanated from their own experiences: they had become the “new reality of the nation,” declaring the shack dwellers’ movement a university where they “think their own struggles” and “are not poor in mind.”⁶² Subtly criticising Mandela’s historical leadership, the poor were taking matters into their own hands, seeing themselves as the force and reason for their own liberation; they had become their own Mandelas.⁶³

A theological engagement with this might take this further, for surely S’bu Zikode is saying that Mandela comes or stands in the prophetic trajectory of Jesus Christ. He is, in some respects, like Christ. But the real Mandela, the second Mandela has not been fully faithful to this prophetic trajectory,⁶⁴ and so another has arisen in the prophetic trajectory of Jesus, the people themselves. Put differently, from the perspective of a socially engaged biblical scholar, the people (in Abahlali’s particular sense of the term) were always at the core of God’s project of liberation, with their own organic intellectuals, like Jesus,

61 <http://abahlali.org/node/302>.

62 Citing Zikode, “‘We Are the Third Force,’” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 1/2 (2006).

63 Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, 147.

64 I invoke here Walter Brueggemann’s sense of theological ‘trajectory’; see Brueggemann, “Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel,” in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (eds. Gottwald and Horsley; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

who gave prophetic expression to the people's theology of each particular era. God's liberation project was always about the people, with the people as the key agents of the project, with God.⁶⁵

In its initial tribute to Nelson Mandela on his death (5 December 2013), the African National Congress offered its own theological commentary, saying, "He loved the ANC. Hence his frequent words that upon his death he would join 'the nearest branch of the ANC in heaven.'"⁶⁶ This is perhaps an allusion to the theological notion expressed in 'the Lord's prayer', where Jesus (through Q and Matthew) reminds his disciples that they should pray for God's kingdom to come on earth "as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). And in his tribute to Mandela, which emphasizes the theological dimensions of Mandela's legacy, Anthony Egan draws attention to the centrality of dignity. In his theological tribute to Nelson Mandela, Anthony Egan, from the Jesuit Institute of South Africa, locates dignity at the centre of Mandela's theological legacy. He "lived dignity" and he "demanded" dignity, says Egan.⁶⁷

While we might not dispute Mandela's personal legacy, Abahlali demands that this legacy take structural form. The weave of the fabric of South African society, they claim, must be constituted by dignity. Sampie Terreblanche reminds us that South Africa has inherited "a history of inequality". South Africa's economic system has moved, Terreblanche argues, "over the past 30 years from one of colonial and racial capitalism to a neo-liberal, first-world, capitalist enclave that is disengaging itself from a large part of the black labour force". This transformation, he continues, though it has "coincided with the introduction of a system of representative democracy which is effectively controlled by a black, predominantly African, elite", still exhibits "an ominous systemic character". The shape this system takes is as follows:

In the new politico-economic system, individual members of the upper classes (comprising one third of the population) profit handsomely from mainstream economic activity, while the mainly black lumpenproletariat (comprising 50 per cent of the population) is increasingly pauperised.

65 The notion of 'God's project of liberation' was used in both Latin American and South African liberation theologies in the 1980s; see Mesters, *God's Project* (Cape Town: The Theology Exchange Programme, nd).

66 Reporter, *ANC on Mandela: "The Large Baobab Tree Has Fallen"* (Mail & Guardian, 2013 [cited 26 June 2015]); available from <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-12-06-anc-remembers-mandela-as-large-african-boabab>.

67 Egan, "Nelson Rolihlahla Mande (1918–2013)," in *Jesuit Institute South Africa Online Bulletin* (Pretoria: Jesuit Institute, 2013).

Ironically, individual members of the black and white upper class in the new system seem as unconcerned about its dysfunctionality as individual members of the white elite were about that of the old. The common denominator between the old and the new systems is that part of society was/is systemically and undeservedly enriched, while the majority of the population were/are systemically and undeservedly impoverished—in the old system through *systemic exploitation*, and in the new system through *systemic neglect*.⁶⁸

Abahlali locates the centre of this systemic neglect in the refusal to recognise the dignity of the poor and marginalised. And, I suggest in this epilogue, in order to use the African Bible to get the economy back, the work of socially engaged biblical and theological activists includes locating ourselves and our resources alongside such social movements. Among the resources we can offer are the tools to recognise the dignity of marginal voices in our biblical and theological traditions. That our biblical and theological traditions are internally contested is a significant conceptual contribution in itself, moving away from the authoritarian singularity of claims that ‘the Bible says’, which tend to restrict the Bible to moral matters.⁶⁹

Biblical scholarship, as we have seen with South African Black Theology, offers access to these contending voices. The availability of such resources is potentially useful. This point is made somewhat provocatively by Xola Skosana, a Christian minister from Cape Town. He has called for the Black preacher to “exhume the black body of Jesus from the grave”. “The black preacher must point to the cross and remind black people that their cross on the ballot paper on May 18, 2011 should not be to legitimise and perpetuate the corruption and political hegemony that keep black people in servitude and in modernised slavery”. But, says *Mail & Guardian* writer Percy Zvomuya, having interviewed and cited Skosana, “today’s black preacher is incapable of that, Skosana believes”, going on to cite phrases from Skosana’s analysis: “He lacks the necessary tools, skills and the gift to place scripture in its context. The black preacher is unwilling to submit ‘to the discipline of study’ and is given to the ‘gimmicks’ first sold to him by ‘the American TV evangelist’”.⁷⁰

Zvomuya is correct in saying as the headline to his article puts it, “Jesus Christ lived in the townships”. He did indeed, and his people are the people

68 Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality*, 422–423.

69 See Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

70 <http://abahlali.org/node/7992>.

represented in Q (the ‘people’s’ document used by both Matthew and Luke) and Mark, in the people of the *Son of Man* film, and in the people of the shack settlements, people who continue to construct their struggle around their dignity. The people in their struggle are dignity’s trajectory. Zvomuya is also correct in recognizing that prophetic theology requires particular tools, skills and gifts in order to read the Bible for social-economic transformation.

The Kairos Document identified three theological trajectories contending with each other in apartheid South Africa.⁷¹ It argued that State Theology, the theology of the apartheid state (and its ecclesiastical alliance partners), constituted a direct attack on the dignity of racially categorised and segregated sectors. Racial discrimination was an assault on human dignity. Church Theology, the mainstream theology of the churches, had a similar effect. By steadfastly focussing on the individual, yet refusing to locate the individual within political and economic structures, Church Theology participated in the systemic denigration of human dignity. Against these two dominant theological trajectories, *The Kairos Document* called the churches in South Africa towards a Prophetic Theology in which human dignity was the central tenet.

However, *The Kairos Document* erred in arguing that both State Theology and Church Theology were not biblical theologies.⁷² For, unfortunately, both of these theological trajectories are found in the Bible. Indeed, this is what made these theological trajectories so dangerous; they are biblical theologies. And while some forms of South African theology have not had the tools to deal with this biblical reality, South African Black Theology offers us the resources we need, via the work of Itumeleng Mosala. The Bible, according to Mosala’s analysis, is a complex text best understood as a “signified practice”. “It cannot be reduced to a simple socially and ideologically unmediated ‘Word of God’. Nor can it be seen merely as a straight forward mirror of events in Ancient Israel. On the contrary it is a *production*, a remaking of those events and processes”.⁷³ Using the language of redaction criticism (and drawing on Robert Coote’s work on the biblical book of Amos),⁷⁴ Mosala argues that different ‘layers’ can be

71 Kairos, *Challenge to the Church: The Kairos Document: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein: The Kairos theologians, 1985).

72 West, “Tracing the ‘Kairos’ Trajectory from South Africa (1985) to Palestine (2009): Discerning Continuities and Differences,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 143 (2012).

73 Mosala, “Black Theology,” (Unpublished paper, 1989), 3. For an argument about how Mosala’s work might be used in the South African post-liberation era see McKay, “Mark and Literary Materialism: Towards a Liberative Reading for (Post)Apartheid South Africa” (University of Newcastle, NSW, 2015).

74 Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

detected within or across a biblical book, each with a particular ideological code. Some layers of the Bible are cast in “hegemonic codes”, which represent social and historical realities in ancient Israel in terms of the interests of the ruling classes. Other parts of the Bible are encoded in “professional codes”, which have a relative autonomy, but which still operate within the hegemony of the dominant code. Then there are layers that are signified through “negotiated codes”, which contain a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements, but which still take the dominant codes as their starting point. Finally, there are a few textual sites or sources that represent “oppositional codes” which are grounded in the interests and religious perspectives of the under-classes of the communities of the Bible.⁷⁵

Similar work has been done with the New Testament, as indicated above in Richard Horsley’s analysis of the synoptic gospels. Horsley and others discern distinctive oral and textual voices in and behind the final form of the biblical text.⁷⁶ How many layers or voices there are is not the key question; what is important, as Mosala makes clear, is recognising that there are contending voices in the Bible. The Bible is a site of struggle.

The discourse of dignity is nurtured, as both Scott and Horsley demonstrate, in the sites that the poor and marginalised secure in the face of domination. It is in these sites that an internal ethic, “a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice”,⁷⁷ is forged and fostered. And it is here that the socially engaged biblical scholar must bring the resources with which to struggle with an ambiguous Bible—a Bible that is itself a site of struggle—a tool of imperialism that has become an African icon.

75 Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41–42.

76 Horsley ed., *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q (Semeia Studies)*; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

77 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 114.

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